John's apologetic christology : legitimation and development in Johannine christology.

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ABSTRACT

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The present work is a study of the origins and development of the christology of the Fourth Gospel. It begins by assessing previous explanations of the reasons why Johannine christology developed along the lines that it did. These previous approaches are classified in four categories: syncretistic, organic, individual creativity and sociological. The present work adopts a sociological approach and, making use of Berger and Luckmann's work on 'legitimation', suggests that it was in attempting to defend the christological beliefs which he inherited that the Fourth Evangelist developed early christological tradition in the distinctive way that he did.

Rather than adopt a source-critical approach, which would by definition be highly speculative, we attempt to trace John's development of earlier ideas and motifs, such as Son of Man, Wisdom and agency. The two main sections deal with the issue of the relationship between Jesus and God and the relationship between Jesus and Moses (and their respective revelations). In each chapter, we seek to show (i) that there is evidence in the passage under consideration that John is engaging in legitimation, (ii) that the issue in the debate is an element of christology which is pre-Johannine and (iii) that in responding to the objections which had been raised by his opponents, the Evangelist develops earlier christological motifs, so that the controversies in which he was engaged can explain the lines along which Johannine christology developed. We then go on to consider whether the various developments made by the Evangelist were then unified into a coherent portrait of Jesus, and finally to consider the implications which our study may have for future research on John and for the use of John in contemporary theology.

JOHN'S APOLOGETIC CHRISTOLOGY:
LEGITIMATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN JOHANNINE CHRISTOLOGY

by

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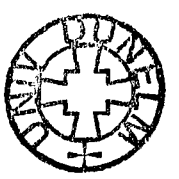

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Declaration

The material contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree in this or any university.

PREFACE

While a PhD thesis is the work of a single individual student, I doubt whether any student has ever successfully completed such a course of study without the support of many people, the endless list of 'without whoms'. Here I have attempted to thank in particular some of the key friends, encouragers and supporters who have made the completion of this work possible; I am certain that, were I to attempt to name everyone who at some point offered a word of advice or encouragement, the main body of this thesis would be dwarfed by a preface twice its size.

In relation to the academic side of this work, I wish to thank above all Prof. James Dunn for his supervision, providing helpful guidance and insightful criticisms throughout my period of research; the members of the Durham New Testament Seminar from 1995-1998, and in particular Jerry Truex, a colleague and friend, for encouragement, conversations and feedback above and beyond the call of duty; the members of the JOHN-LITR and IOUDAIOS-L discussion groups for feedback and countless useful pieces of information; Ray Porter and Eryl Rowlands for teaching me about the Gospel of John and helping me to fall in love with it; and Dr. Alan Ford for help with overcoming 'printing obstacles'.

For financial assistance, I wish to thank in particular the Miss Elizabeth Drummond's Trust, the Mylne Trust, the Gilchrist Educational Trust and the De Bury Scholarship for their help with the cost of undertaking and completing this course of study. Many others are to be thanked for their help in times of crisis, with the cost of books and/or attending conferences, and for various other forms of financial support, among whom especially the Dean's Fund, Ted and Mary Baines, the Romanian Missionary Society, Trinity Tabernacle of Gravesend, the Listeners Trust, the New Durlston Trust and the Butterworth and Bayley Charity.

For providing the music to which I most often studied, I wish to thank in particular: Anton Bruckner, Gustav Mahler, Sergei Rachmaninov, Dmitri Shostakovich, Vangelis and Mike Oldfield; plus many others too numerous to name.

Lastly, but most of all rather than least, my wife Elena, for providing encouragement and support from before the beginning of this project until its completion.

Finally, I may mention that I have adhered for the most part to *JBL* abbreviations, and in references to Philo to the standard abbreviations listed in Yonge's edition.

James F. McGrath
March 1998

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOHANNINE CHRISTOLOGY

In recent times, an area which has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention is the development of Christian doctrine, and in particular christology.[1] James Dunn refers at the beginning of the preface to the second edition of his *Christology in the Making* to "the unassailable observation that the NT documents cover an intense period of innovation and/or development in what we now call Christology."[2] *That* christology - whether in New Testament times or in the subsequent centuries - has undergone changes and developments of some sort, appears to be beyond question. However, the question of *how* and/or *why* doctrine develops has not been answered with any similar degree of consensus. This lack of consensus is perhaps nowhere more clearly visible than in the case of the Fourth Gospel.

1.1 Previous Approaches

In contemporary scholarship a number of different approaches have been taken to the question of *why* christology developed, and more specifically, why the Fourth Gospel contains a christology which is so similar to, and yet at the same time so different from, that found in earlier documents. Although all attempts to categorize the views of others risk oversimplification, it is nonetheless necessary to distinguish

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[1] Important recent studies of the development of christology in the New Testament period include Hengel 1986; 1995; Hurtado 1988; Dunn 1989; Casey 1991; Brown 1994. Studies relating to the post New Testament period include Wiles 1967; Hanson 1988.

[2] Dunn 1989: xii.

between different approaches if we are to evaluate them briefly and effectively. We may thus for convenience group the different perspectives we shall be considering as follows:

(1) Syncretistic Development: These approaches argue that the Gospel of John is different from earlier writings primarily because of an influx of Gentiles, and/or Samaritans, into the church. These new converts brought their own backgrounds and worldviews, which led to the character of the church's christology taking on a different form, one which more closely resembles Gentile or Samaritan beliefs than those of earlier Jewish Christians.[3]

(2) Organic Development: These approaches argue that the Gospel of John simply draws out the logical implications of what was already implicit in earlier beliefs. This is not to say that there is no development, but simply that the development does not represent a departure from the original content and character of Jewish Christian christology. It is rather the drawing of the implications which naturally follow from these earlier beliefs, implications which, in a sense, someone was bound to draw sooner or later.[4]

(3) Individual Creativity: These approaches suggest that the distinctive Johannine developments are the product of a

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[3] So e.g. Goulder 1977; Brown 1979:34-58; Casey 1991. Brown's name sits uncomfortably among these other examples; even though he appeals to a 'syncretistic' stimulus to development, Brown also seeks to do justice to the continuity between earlier and later stages (cf. e.g. Brown 1994:109,140,150).

[4] So e.g. Moule 1977; Marshall 1967; France 1989; 1995.

particular individual, presumably a Christian leader of some sort, who reinterpreted earlier christological traditions in light of his own distinctive viewpoint, imagination and personality. The distinctive Johannine christology thus represents the unique insight of a particular individual.[5]

(4) Sociological Approaches: These approaches suggest that the distinctive Johannine christology is the product of a particular social setting. Some upholders of this approach emphasize that development takes place as earlier traditions are applied to a new context and new issues.[6]

These categories are simply heuristic, and it would be easy to distinguish the views of various scholars along other lines. There is also potential for overlap, as some scholars (whether successfully or otherwise) seek to utilize more than one of these approaches. For our purposes, this categorization will be adequate, and we may now turn to an evaluation of the work and results of key recent advocates of each.

1.1.1 Syncretistic Approaches

The term 'syncretism' and its cognates have in recent scholarship come to be problematic, in particular due to the fact that this term was originally used to refer to the influence of 'Hellenism' on 'Judaism' and on the Jewish

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[5] So e.g. Robinson 1985:296-300; Hengel 1989:104f,134.

[6] So e.g. Neyrey 1985; 1988; McGrath 1998a:42,49; also Kysar 1985:190,200,203; de Boer 1996:112-117,311, who take a similar approach to the one adopted here but without the explicit use of sociological models. It is this type of approach that we will be adopting in this study. See below 1.2.

phenomenon of Christianity.[7] The earliest proponents of the syncretistic approach argued that christology underwent a major transformation when it moved from the world of Palestinian Judaism, which was believed to be a purer form of Judaism, to that of Hellenistic (i.e., Diaspora) Judaism, which was subject to the influences of paganism. Such a view has been rendered untenable by the realization that the traditional distinction between 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' does not accurately represent the situation in the period we are studying. As the work of Martin Hengel in particular has clearly demonstrated,[8] all Judaism during our period was 'Hellenistic Judaism', inasmuch as there was no Judaism which was not part of the Hellenistic world and influenced in some way by its thought and culture.

The awareness that all Judaism, including that found in Palestine and even that of the Pharisees, was influenced by Hellenism in some way or other has been accompanied by an awareness of the diversity which existed in Judaism in and around New Testament times. This diversity is such that Jacob Neusner has even felt it necessary to speak of 'Judaisms' in the plural.[9] Of course, the traditional proponents of

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[7] Levinskaya 1996:197-205 has recently shown a number of problems and ambiguities in the use and meaning of the term itself. It is retained here because of its importance in the work of previous scholars advocating a model of this type. Since we shall go on to reject this solution to the problem of christological development, these problems do not directly affect the present study, although it will clearly affect the proponents of models of christological development along these lines.

[8] Hengel 1974, 1989b. See also Bartlett 1985:7f; Dunn 1991b:9f; Barclay 1996:83-91. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was also influential in bringing about this realization.

[9] The use of the plural 'Judaisms' has been argued for in particular by Jacob Neusner (see Neusner 1993:1f), although it can be found as early as the writings of C. G. Montefiore at the beginning of this century. See also Dunn 1991b:18, 285 n.1, and the objections of Barclay 1996:400f.

syncretistic models of development were aware of this diversity, which they attributed to the differences between the 'purer' Judaism of Palestine and the Judaism of the Diaspora which had been influenced by Hellenism. But it is precisely this type of distinction which has been proved untenable. The view that the rabbis or Pharisees were the upholders of an orthodox form of Judaism, which was defended in their synagogues, can no longer be maintained: there was simply *no generally recognized orthodox Judaism* in this period. Even the Pharisees show clear signs of having been influenced by Hellenism.[10] The conclusion which Hengel has reached must be emphasized: "Since after a more than three-hundred-year history under the influence of Greek culture Palestinian Judaism can also be described as 'Hellenistic Judaism', *the term 'Hellenistic' as currently used no longer serves to make any meaningful differentiation in terms of the history of religions within the history of earliest Christianity*"[11]. Many works which in earlier times were assumed, because of the evidences of Hellenistic influence upon them, to derive from the Diaspora, may in fact have originated in Palestine[12].

Yet while this makes certain older views untenable, it may still be possible for scholars who wish to argue for a syncretistic-type model to find ways of expressing that there were genuine differences between Jews on the one hand and other inhabitants of the Hellenistic world on the other, without this

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[10] Hengel 1989b:51f.

[11] Hengel 1989b:53.

[12] Hengel 1989b:22-28.

implying a return to the old, outmoded 'Judaism' vs. 'Hellenism' schema. A possible way forward is hinted at in a recent article by Jonathan Goldstein. He draws a parallel between the situation of Jews in Greek or Roman-ruled Palestine and that of Indian Muslims in British-ruled India.[13] "The members of the Muslim Aligargh movement in British-ruled India on no account would adopt Christianity, but otherwise the members of the movement aimed at becoming gentlemen in the English mould. Just as Islam left the way open for many forms of Anglicizing, so the Torah left the way open for many forms of Hellenizing". The Jews had a different *religion* from that of most of their neighbours, and also had a different *culture*. Both of these inseparable aspects of Jewish life were influenced by Hellenism, but that does not imply that Jewish religion and culture became identical with that of Hellenistic pagans, any more than Greek influence led to Roman culture, for example, ceasing to be distinguishable from that of the Greeks. To return to the analogy which Goldstein draws with India under British rule, Indian culture was clearly influenced by British culture, but no one has any doubt that it was still possible to continue to speak meaningfully of 'Indian culture' and 'British culture'. The edges will have been somewhat blurry, and there will have been individual Indians who so wholly adopted British ways that they might appear to have been 'more British than the British themselves'. But on the whole, it would appear that the distinction between different cultures, and thus between 'Jewish' and 'non-Jewish', remains valid, provided it is used

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[13] Goldstein 1981:66.

carefully and with the important qualifications which have just been discussed.[14]

Having clarified this point, we may define more clearly what a valid syncretistic model might look like. A modern form of this type of model could focus on what were important differences between Hellenistic Jews on the one hand and other races and religions of the Hellenistic world, and in particular on the important difference between the monotheistic[15] Jews and their generally polytheistic neighbours.[16] The basic argument of syncretistic models of christological development tends to follow something along these lines: Gentiles accepted (or worshipped) more than one god; Jesus was regarded as divine and worshipped; therefore, the concept of Jesus' divinity is a product of Gentile influence on Christianity rather than a

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[14] For a helpful approach which avoids defining a religion in monolithic terms cf. Smith 1980. For the issue of religious and cultural adaptation see further Barclay 1996:87-91.

[15] Even the definition of monotheism is not without its difficulties. See the useful discussion in Stuckenbruck 1995:15-21; also Hurtado 1988:17-39; 1993; Rainbow 1991; Dunn 1991b:19-21. See further below, ch.3.

[16] As Dunn points out (1991b:20f), many Gentiles were what he calls 'syncretistic monotheists', inasmuch as they believed that there was one ultimate reality of which the many gods were either different manifestations or simply different names, whereas Jews were generally 'exclusive monotheists'. The Jews for the most part allowed for the existence of the gods of other nations, and of a whole range of intermediate beings between the most high God and mankind. The key difference appears to have been, in somewhat oversimplified terms, the question of worship: other beings or 'gods' existed, but were not to be worshipped. This view is discussed further in Bauckham 1981:322; 1992:816. That all Jews understood themselves to be monotheists seems clear, but that not all were exclusive monotheists becomes apparent when we consider the case of the inscription Ἐυλογει τὸν θεὸν Πτολεμαῖος Διονυσίου Ἰουδαῖος (Ptolemy, son of Dionysius, a Jew, thanks (the) God), found not in a synagogue but in a *temple of Pan* in Egypt (quoted Hengel 1974:264; see also Bartlett 1996:99f,312f). Dunn himself appears to be aware of this, since he notes that Jews coped with the problem of other gods, not only through subordinating them to their own God, but also through absorbing them and identifying them with their own God (1991b:21). A similar view to Dunn's is found in Hurtado 1993:356f. See further our discussion below n.84 and n.85 and in ch.3.

natural growth out of the (very Jewish) message of Jesus.[17] To argue this way, in light of our discussion above, is not incoherent, although we shall see reasons below for ultimately rejecting this solution to the problem of the development of Johannine christology.

1.1.1.1 Gentile Influence on Johannine Christology[18]

We may now consider the views of those who think that John's distinctive christology took its present form under the influence of Gentiles who had joined the community. The most recent exponent of this view is Maurice Casey, whose argumentation is representative of this approach to the problem of christological development. Casey's argument may be summed up as follows: those Christians who came to view Jesus as divine did so under the influence of Gentile thought, to which they were susceptible because the Judaism of which they were a part was a Judaism which had already gone some way towards assimilating to Gentile ways.[19] He is aware of the problem of Jewish diversity, and compares the issue in relation to New Testament times to the issue in modern times of 'Who is a Jew?'[20] Yet he stresses that in order to reach some sort of conclusion, a concept of orthodoxy is necessary,[21] and this he finds in the Torah-observant Judaism of the Pharisees and

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[17] So e.g. Casey 1991:23-38. See also Fuller 1965:232f, who nonetheless seeks to emphasize the underlying continuity in spite of these influences.

[18] What follows repeats many of the arguments we have made in McGrath 1996.

[19] Casey 1991:33f.

[20] Casey 1991:11f.

[21] Casey 1991:17-20.

Essenes. Casey also suggests eight features as distinctively Jewish, so that if someone has all eight he is clearly Jewish, and if none he is clearly a Gentile.[22] He observes that "ethnicity...may be perceived as an overriding factor. People may be perceived as Jewish if it is the only one of the eight identity factors that they have, and they may be perceived as Gentile if they have all the other seven identity factors, but not ethnicity".[23]

Casey's work is helpful inasmuch as it sets out clearly the presuppositions and methodology which are used by those who argue along these lines. Yet it will probably already be obvious from our discussion in the previous section that Casey's argument is open to severe criticism at a number of key points. Firstly, Casey is working with a concept of orthodoxy which is anachronistic and therefore inappropriate for the period in question: the Pharisees did not have the authority to define what is and is not legitimately considered Judaism until long after the New Testament period. There were simply no universally recognized leaders in a position to define Judaism in this time.[24] It is true that the Pharisees considered their interpretation of Judaism to be the correct one and the most faithful to Israel's scriptures and traditions, but this is also true of the Qumran community, and was presumably equally true of all of the other Jewish parties. The situation in Israel/Judaism during this period has been compared to the

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[22] These are: ethnicity, scripture, monotheism, circumcision, sabbath observance, dietary laws, purity laws and major festivals.

[23] Casey 1991:14. See also Barclay 1996:402-413.

[24] Johnson 1989:426-428; Sanders 1992:388-404; Alexander 1992:3,21; Barclay 1996:85.

situation in a multi-party state such as the U.S. or Great Britain. In such a situation, there are a number of groups, each of whom would like to be in a position of authority and enforce its understanding of the way life in the nation should be lived, but no one party represents the whole population, so that even the party in power cannot legitimately claim to be 'the only truly American/British party'.[25]

It will be helpful to contrast Casey's view with that of Jacob Neusner, who writes, "If we invoke any of the ordinary criteria for a social entity of the here and now, we find that none fits the category, "Jewish people", whether in antiquity or today. A social entity in the here and now defines itself by commonalities, whether of territory, or of language and culture, or some other tangible, shared qualities. But of these, the Jews then had and now have none...Jews lived all over the world; they did not have a single language in common, and by the criteria of economics, on the one side, or politics, on the second, or shared culture, on the third, nothing bound them together. Speaking solely in secular terms, every picture of the Jews as the single entity, "Israel", proves a pious fantasy."[26]

It may of course be possible to find common denominators, just as Dunn has attempted to do by speaking of 'four pillars of ancient Judaism'.[27] These he defines as monotheism, election of Israel, covenant (focused in Torah), and the Temple. Yet the

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[25] Cf. Segal 1986:59. For a similar religious example from contemporary America cf. Grabbe 1977:151f.

[26] Neusner 1993:2; see further his discussion on pp.50,62.

[27] Dunn 1991b:18-36. Neusner expresses his essential agreement with Dunn's assessment in Neusner 1993:52f. See also McEleney 1978:84f,87.

difficulty is that, precisely as a set of lowest common denominators, these points appear not to have been the central *emphases* in the various Jewish groups of this period.[28] We cannot, on the basis of the texts available to us from this period, say that there was universal agreement on what monotheism meant in practice, on the place of the Gentiles, on how the Torah was to be interpreted and applied, or on the validity of the present Temple.[29] It thus becomes impossible to speak of a Jewish 'orthodoxy' in this period, and thus the question "who *was* a Jew?" becomes as difficult to answer as its modern analogue, "who *is* a Jew?".

This point leads us on to another key element of Casey's argument. In his view, it is precisely because the Johannine Christians have lost their Jewish self-identity that they were able to develop a christology in which Jesus is considered divine.[30] He regards the Johannine references to 'the Jews' as decisive evidence for this. Casey's conclusion here is questionable on a number of grounds. We may begin with the explicit evidence of 3 John 7. The Johannine epistles may with

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[28] Neusner 1993:53. See also Barclay 1996:402.

[29] Cf. Aune 1976:6f; Johnson 1989:426-428. There was also wide diversity of practice concerning the observance of purity laws (cf. Dunn 1990b:140-147). Thus the explanation concerning water pots for purification (John 2:6; Casey 1991:28f) need not imply that there was at least one God-fearer or unobservant Jew present among John's intended readership. That many Jews observed purity laws even in the Diaspora is clear enough (cf. Neusner 1990:258-271; 1992:223f), but nonetheless there were clearly also some who felt that such observance was unnecessary, particularly when there was no occasion for regular contact with the Temple (cf. Philo, *Mig.Abr.* 89-93). Likewise, the explanation of terms like 'rabbi' need not imply anything more than the presence of Jews whose first and perhaps only language was Greek. On the epigraphic evidence, which suggests that most Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews used a translation such as (νομο)διδάσκαλος rather than the transliterated 'rabbi', see Lohse 1968; Cohen 1981. See also Martyn 1996:126f.

[30] Casey 1991:27.

reasonable certainty be attributed to a member or members of the same early Christian community as that in which the Fourth Gospel was produced, since they show clear affinities in their theology and language.[31] In this text, those who are not part of the author's group are called ἐθνικῶν, 'Gentiles', a fact which implies that the group of which the author is a part does not have a Gentile self-identity.[32] This is further indicated in the Gospel itself by the fact that the Johannine Christians evaluate positively the title 'Israel(ite)' (John 1:47-49), and that the author can even state that 'salvation is of the Jews' (4:22).

However, we also find in the Fourth Gospel that the Johannine Christians defined their identity over against a group whom they called 'the Jews'. This fact does appear to create difficulty for the view that the Johannine Christians had a *Jewish* self-identity. Thus, if our understanding of John as a Christian-Jewish work is to be maintained, it will be necessary to find an alternative explanation of this Johannine phenomenon.

The key to understanding of the Johannine references to 'the Jews' would appear to be an awareness of the background against which the Fourth Gospel was written. We may begin by considering its cultural setting. In ancient Mediterranean cultures, the collective identity was primary, and it was completely normal to engage in what today would be considered

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[31] On this see further Brown 1982:20-30; Lieu 1991:16f.

[32] Cf. Casey 1996:115f.

unhelpful 'stereotyping.'[33] Even today, statements such as 'the English are very reserved' are made, including by people who are aware that there are exceptions to this general principle. In the case of the Fourth Gospel, the Johannine Christians had been part of a Jewish community which refused to believe in Jesus, and which took a hostile attitude towards the teaching and beliefs promulgated by these Christians.[34] It was 'natural', in this cultural context, for a group which had had such experiences to think of 'the Jews' as 'those who have hardened their hearts and refused to believe in their own Messiah.'[35] However, in thinking this way the author is still aware that there were Jews who believed openly in Jesus, as well as secret sympathizers within the Jewish community.

It must also be kept in mind that the Johannine Christians had recently been expelled from the synagogue against their will. The background to this occurrence is usually thought to be the attempt by certain rabbis in the post-70 period to define more clearly, and in line with their own particular views and emphases, what it means to be a Jew.[36]

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[33] Malina 1981:53-60. See further Freyne 1985; Johnson 1989; McGrath 1996:13f.

[34] Cf. the evidence amassed below, 2.1.

[35] This is not to condone the many fiery statements made by the author of the Gospel, but simply to demonstrate that it appears less striking against the context of its cultural setting than it does to us today, after so many years of Christian anti-semitism. See further Johnson 1989; Painter 1991:23f; Casey 1996:225.

[36] See Wengst 1981:48-73; Dunn 1991b:222,238f; Manns 1991:469-509. For our purposes it is not essential that the Jewish community of which the Johannine Christians had been a part be supposed to have been *directly* affected by the council of Jamnia; it is sufficient that the aforementioned Jewish community was part of a wider phenomenon of this period, the felt need to bring the Jewish people together under a common banner and with a clear plan for the continuation of this people and religion even after the disastrous events of 70 C.E. See also Kysar 1985b:191f n.6; Ashton 1991:151-159. In light of our earlier discussion, we should perhaps also stress that this was an attempt, not to *defend* Jewish orthodoxy, but to *define* Jewish orthodoxy. In the earlier period, differing definitions co-existed, whereas in the post-

The Johannine Christians had been 'defined out' by the leaders of their community: in other words, the majority of Jews in the community from which they were expelled refused to regard them as Jews, claiming that title exclusively for themselves. The Johannine Christians cede the term, but in other ways claim to be the true Israelites and those who have truly remained faithful to the heritage of Israel's traditions and Scriptures.[37]

One of Casey's major points is that the Johannine Christians have defined their identity over against 'the Jews', and are thus no longer 'Jews' themselves. We have already seen the difficulties involved in maintaining such a position, and once again the crucial point here seems to be that Casey is working with too narrow a definition of Judaism for the period in question.[38] In the later period when an 'orthodox' form of Judaism developed, many other groups and beliefs were defined out along with the Johannine Christians,[39] among these some whom Casey recognizes as clearly Jewish. For instance, Philo's talk of the *logos* as a 'second god' would have been excluded as 'two

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war period the Pharisaic-Rabbinic school of thought *slowly began* to predominate, and in those areas where it had sufficient power to do so, sought to enforce its own views, and to exclude proponents of certain other views which threatened their own. See also the discussion and illuminating modern illustration offered in de Boer 1996:57.

[37] See further the helpful discussion in Dunn 1991b:156-160. See also Painter 1991:54; Smith 1995:89f; McGrath 1996:11-14. Casey 1996:124-127 argues against Dunn and others who seek to show that there was a tendency to distinguish between 'Israel' and 'Jews'. Even if the evidence does not support the case, this does not preclude the possibility that John made such a distinction. This is nonetheless somewhat beside the point, as John can use 'Jews' as well as 'Israel' in a positive sense (John 4:22). Cf. the helpful and balanced discussion in Harvey 1996:91f,249f.

[38] See our discussion above (1.1.1).

[39] Thus Ashton notes that it is not at all surprising that many important Jewish works from the intertestamental period and New Testament times were preserved, not by Jews, but by Christians (1991:159).

powers' heresy in this later period in much the same way that Johannine and other forms of Christianity had been.[40] Were Casey to allow the same looser definition of monotheism for John as he does for Philo, the former might also be included within the broad spectrum of first century Judaism. Perhaps it is only because of our knowledge in hindsight that Christianity eventually became a separate religion that it is possible for Casey to maintain the view that he does. Thus one cannot help but wonder whether, if Philo's teaching had been more widely propagated and, after such views were excluded by the rabbis, had produced a separate religion called 'Philonism', Casey would not have regarded Philo's teaching concerning this 'second god' as a break with Jewish orthodoxy.[41]

Once it has been accepted that there was no one clear orthodox Judaism in this time, the fact that the Johannine Christians may have held to a spiritualizing interpretation of the Temple or of the Jewish feasts, regarding them as fulfilled in Christ, need not prevent us from considering them to have been Jewish Christians. On the contrary, the very fact that they felt the feasts and Temple to be so important that they needed to show in some way their fidelity to these institutions, could equally suggest just the opposite, that these were indeed Jewish Christians.[42]

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[40] Cf. Segal 1977:179f.

[41] McGrath 1996:6. See further Hurtado 1993 on this issue. He raises a number of important criticisms of Casey on pp.350f. On Johannine christology and monotheism see below ch.3.

[42] Cf. Philo's attitude to those who, in interpreting the Torah figuratively, rejected its literal meaning: Philo disagrees with them, but does not regard them as no longer being Jews; see his *Mig. Abr.*, 89ff. Casey gives 'half a point' to the Fourth Gospel in relation to monotheism and other distinguishing features on his scale (Casey 1991:29; 1996:114). In our view, this undermines his whole project: if differing views on monotheism, scripture, etc. can be more or less

Thus, in contrast to Casey's conclusions, "The prominence and character of this tension between Jesus and "the Jews" point the exegete firmly toward a mainly Jewish context for the fourth Gospel."[43] Dunn suggests that the conflict between the Johannine Christians and 'the Jews' be read, not as a conflict between two clearly distinct religions, but between two Jewish groups, each attempting to claim that it represents the true continuation of Israel's ancient heritage and beliefs.[44] The language of denunciation of 'the Jews' in John, and the references to them as 'children of darkness/the devil', is the language of Jewish sectarianism, as may be seen from much of the Qumran literature, even though the key term, 'the Jews', is not used there.[45] It is, however, used by the later Jewish-Christians who authored the Pseudo-Clementines,[46] and is not all that different from the denunciations of 'Israel' found in the writings attributed to the (clearly Israelite) prophets in the Jewish scriptures. Of course, in hindsight, the Pharisaic rabbis held on to the title 'Judaism', and Christianity did become a separate religion; this is not in doubt. However, it

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'Jewish', then the whole issue of Jewishness becomes much less black and white than even Casey's 8-point scale. This in turns opens up the possibility that John, while probably not getting a full 8 points, will get far more than the 1.5 given by Casey, or alternatively that many authors that are currently classed as Jewish by Casey will need to be recategorized. On the probable observance of Torah by the Johannine Christians see further Pancaro 1975:530; Martyn 1977:158f; Whitacre 1982:64-68; Gaston 1993; McGrath 1996:7-10.

[43] Dunn 1991a:303.

[44] Dunn 1992:200.

[45] Cf. Johnson 1989 on polemical language in early Judaism and Christianity.

[46] Cf. Ps-Clem. *Recognitions* 1.50; 5.11; also McGrath 1996:13.

is important not to anachronistically read the final outcome of a development back into its earlier stages.[47]

It would thus seem unwise to follow Casey in regarding the Johannine Christians as 'syncretistic' Jews who essentially apostatized from Judaism to produce Gentile Christianity. The whole notion of a Judaism which had not been influenced in any way by its neighbours in the wider Hellenistic world is no longer tenable. Although one can sympathize with his desire to find a clear definition of orthodoxy to work with, it has been adequately demonstrated that no such definition can accurately be applied to Judaism in the period in question. Another shortcoming of Casey's thesis is his failure to distinguish with sufficient clarity between the self-understanding of the Johannine Christians and the way others regarded them.[48] He also overemphasizes the sense of alienation from Judaism expressed by the Christians who were responsible for producing the Fourth Gospel, failing to do justice to the complementary fact that it is precisely a group of Jewish origin that feels this way. The paradox of John's Gospel's relationship to Judaism is dealt with much better by Meeks: "To put the matter sharply, with some risk of misunderstanding, the Fourth Gospel is most anti-Jewish just at the points it is most Jewish."[49] Were the conflict over Christology reflected in the Gospel also a

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[47] Cf. Dunn 1984:100. On important differences between pagan and Christian forms of anti-Judaism even in the second century, which create difficulties for those who would argue that the latter was simply a sub-category of the former, see Taylor 1995:116-121.

[48] Cf. again Hurtado 1993:354f, who notes the difficulty of defining 'first century Jewish monotheism', and adopts the approach of accepting that first century Jewish monotheism is that which first century Jewish authors who consider themselves monotheists believe.

[49] Meeks 1975:172.

conflict about openness to Gentile influence, we should expect some hint of this in the accusations raised by the Jewish authorities in the course of the Gospel.[50] In light of the evidence we have surveyed, both here and elsewhere, it would seem justified to reject the claim that Johannine Christianity should be regarded as a Gentile, rather than a Jewish, phenomenon, and this suggests that Gentile influence cannot provide the key to explaining and understanding the development of Johannine christology.

1.1.1.2 Samaritan Influence on Johannine Christology

The other main suggestion which has been offered in recent times of a possible syncretistic catalyst for the development of John's high christology is an influx of Samaritan converts into the community. This suggestion is found particularly in the work of Raymond Brown,[51] although other scholars have also suggested links between either the Gospel of John in particular, or higher christology in general, and Samaritanism.[52] Brown's hypothesis is among the most convincing of those positing links with Samaritanism, since it allows for the essentially Jewish setting which the work of Martyn and others has shown to be most likely, while also noting the

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[50] Cf. McGrath 1996:10. This is admittedly an argument from silence, but it is nonetheless perhaps a valid one, inasmuch as those New Testament documents which express openness to Gentiles also feel the need to defend this fact. See also the two recent studies Martyn 1996 and Borgen 1996b, which suggest that there is no real evidence in John either for a Gentile mission which replaced an earlier Jewish mission, or of Hellenistic influence which reached John other than by way of Hellenistic Judaism.

[51] Brown 1979:36ff.

[52] See e.g. Bowman 1975:ch.3; Buchanan 1968; Goulder 1977:67; Hartin 1985:40f. See too the discussion in Ashton 1991:294-299; de Boer 1996:67,117.

necessity to explain the development of the christology which brought the Johannine Christians into conflict with the synagogue. Brown does not attempt to argue that the Johannine Christians lost their sense of Jewish identity,[53] but simply that Samaritan converts influenced the development of Johannine thought to a sufficient extent that other Jews took notice of the presence of what they regarded as distinctively Samaritan ideas.[54]

Brown's suggestion has the merit of placing Johannine Christianity within a Jewish context, while allowing for a development in Christological thinking. The catalyst for this development, the influx of Samaritan converts, would have represented an influx of people holding views which (like the views of the Hellenists described in Acts 7) were disliked by the Jewish leaders and "would have made the Johannine believers in Jesus particularly obnoxious to more traditional Jews."[55]

One difficulty with Brown's proposal is our lack of knowledge of Samaritanism in the first century. As Meeks notes, "Unfortunately even the earliest sources do not lead directly to a point much earlier than the fourth century A.D., when a major literary revival and re-constitution of Samaritan life and thought took place."[56] Thus the use of Samaritan texts to illuminate the New Testament must follow the same cautions that apply to a similar use of Rabbinic texts: they are probably not wholly irrelevant, but cannot be used directly to provide

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[53] Especially in view of passages such as John 4:22.

[54] John 8:48; cf. Brown 1979:37.

[55] Brown 1979:39.

[56] Meeks 1967:219.

information about what their particular group believed in earlier times. A relationship will exist between Samaritanism in the first and fourth centuries, as there exists a relationship between Christianity in the first and fourth centuries, but there may have been just as much development in Samaritanism during this period as there obviously was in Christianity between, say, the time of Paul and the Council of Nicaea. Thus, as Meeks writes, "Samaritanism before the fourth century A.D. remains largely in the dark."[57]

When Samaritan beliefs and traditions are compared with Jewish/Rabbinic texts of a similar date, the distinctives of Samaritanism are somewhat lessened. There was evidently borrowing and interaction between Judaism and Samaritanism even after the two had gone their separate ways.[58] Most studies of motifs in Jewish and Samaritan sources find similar beliefs and traditions in both.[59] Brown refers in particular to Meeks' description of the place of Moses in Samaritanism,[60] but is only able to speak of "strains in John similar to Samaritan thought",[61] and Meeks himself writes in the passage referred to by Brown, "First, the Johannine traditions were shaped, at least in part, by interaction between a Christian community and a hostile *Jewish community whose piety accorded very great importance to Moses* and the Sinai theophany, probably

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[57] Meeks 1967:219. See also Pamment 1982:221; Ashton 1991:298.

[58] So Meeks 1967:216f, with references to several major experts on Samaritanism. See too Pamment 1982:229f.

[59] So e.g. Meeks 1967; 1968; Fossum 1985. See also Painter 1991:98.

[60] Brown 1979:37.

[61] Brown 1979:37.

understood as Moses' ascent to heaven and his enthronement there. Second, it is clear that *the Johannine church had drawn members from that Jewish group as well as from Samaritan circles which held very similar beliefs*, and it has been demonstrated to a high degree of probability that the depiction of Jesus as prophet and king in the Fourth Gospel owes much to traditions which the church inherited from the Moses piety."[62] In his related study of "Moses as God and King", Meeks writes, "The evidence is sufficient...to demonstrate that related and very similar traditions about the ascension of Moses were cultivated not only in Samaritanism, but also in some circles within both Palestinian and diaspora Judaism."[63] Given the uncertainty about first century Samaritanism on the one hand, and the similarity of what we do know about Samaritanism with Jewish and even Rabbinic thought on the other, these appeals to an influx of Samaritan converts do not appear able to provide a convincing explanation of, or catalyst for, the development of Johannine Christology. An influx of Samaritan converts, if one occurred, may not have added anything which could not also be found in contemporary streams of Judaism. In short, the Samaritan hypothesis seems unable to provide a convincing explanation of the development of Johannine christology.[64]

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[62] Meeks 1967:318f, emphasis added.

[63] Meeks 1968:364.

[64] For further criticisms and discussion cf. Pamment 1982.

1.1.1.3 'Heterodox' Jewish Influence on Johannine Christology

A slightly different approach along the same lines is found in the work of Cullmann[65] and Ashton.[66] These scholars have proposed that John be situated within a form of 'heterodox' Judaism, a Judaism which has come under the influence of Gentile modes of thought.[67] Although Cullmann takes the view that there were from the beginning either two types of teaching given by Jesus or two interpretations of his teaching,[68] we have nonetheless felt it appropriate to place his approach in the 'syncretistic' category, since he posits the influence of a different world-view, albeit a different Jewish one, in order to explain the distinctive development of Johannine christology, and the differences between this Judaism and 'mainstream' Judaism are still to be explained in terms of Gentile influence. The key difference between the view of Cullmann and his followers and that of Casey is that the former would regard this syncretistic Judaism and the Christianity it produced as still Jewish in a way that the latter would not.

This approach meets with many of the same difficulties that confront the other approaches we have considered. The concept of 'heterodoxy' is anachronistic, since (as we have seen) there was no such thing as an 'orthodox' Judaism in the first century.[69] This view also fails to explain how the Johannine Christians managed to remain part of their local

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[65] Cullmann 1976, esp. 49-53.

[66] Ashton 1991:294-301.

[67] Cullmann 1976:32f,39-41.

[68] Cullmann 1976:93f.

[69] So rightly Brown 1979:36 n.52, 178.

synagogue for so long before they were expelled. However, if the approaches in this last category are related to conflicts between groups who were attempting to put forward different definitions of 'orthodoxy', that is, different definitions of what is and is not Judaism, then a modified version of this approach may indeed be plausible. All Judaism has since been recognized to be 'Hellenistic Judaism', so that the explanatory power of the reference to Hellenism is severely diminished - although it is nonetheless possible to speak of different streams of thought or different 'sects' within Second Temple Judaism. While appeals to Hellenistic influence will not solve the problem, the study of inner-Jewish sectarian conflict, particularly in the post-70 period, may have light to shed on our topic, provided it is coupled with appropriate socio-historical perspectives, and we shall thus return to this possibility in our section on sociological approaches below.[70]

1.1.1.4 Summary

We have found the attempts to explain the development of Johannine christology in terms of the adoption of ideas from non-Jewish sources unsatisfactory. The Gospel of John gives clear evidence of conflict with another group which is designated 'the Jews', but this most likely reflects a debate about the definition of Judaism which took place between the Johannine Christians and the Jewish majority among whom they lived. There is simply insufficient evidence for an influx of Gentiles into the Johannine community,[71] and on the contrary

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[70] Cf. the sociological approach which we will be adopting, below, 1.2.

[71] The 'Greeks' of John 12:20, while probably Gentiles (cf. Brown 1966:466), were nonetheless clearly proselytes or God-fearers, since

much evidence which indicates that the Johannine Christians in fact continued to regard themselves as faithful to the beliefs, traditions and scriptures of Israel. The evidence from Samaritan sources is too late to be of help to us, and at any rate shares many emphases and beliefs that are also found in various streams of Jewish thought. The development of Johannine christology is thus not best explained in terms of the influence of ideas and worldviews other than the Jewish one in which Christianity first appeared.[72] Relating the development of Johannine christology to the different views which existed within contemporary Judaism may provide a more fruitful avenue of approach, but an explanation in terms of conflict between 'sects' will necessitate an approach which makes use of social-scientific categories and models. We shall consider such approaches below.

1.1.2 Organic Development

As we turn to consider this second category, it should be stressed that the designation of this type of approach as 'organic' development is not intended to imply that the earliest Christians, in seeking to express their beliefs, were not influenced by the language and concepts available to them in the society of which they were a part. Such a claim would border on the ridiculous. No one wishes to claim that the

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they came to Jerusalem for the feast. See further Lindars 1972:427; Martyn 1996:128.

[72] We should reiterate that we are not suggesting that Christianity has never been influenced by thought worlds other than the Jewish one in which it first appeared. What is being emphasized here is simply that the *Fourth Gospel* seems to be too firmly rooted in Jewish thought and concerned with Jewish issues for this to provide the solution to the question of the development of Johannine christology.

concepts used by Christians (and even Jesus himself) to express their Christology did not already have a prior history of meaning in Judaism which was then inherited by the Christians who made use of these terms. Rather, what is being asserted by proponents of organic models of development is that the later stages of christology do not make assertions about Jesus which were not already implied by the claims and impact of Jesus himself. This is not to claim that all of the later terms and concepts actually derive from Jesus himself,[73] but simply that these later expressions of Christians' understanding of Jesus represent a valid, legitimate expression of who Jesus was. This view has been summed up well by Moule, who writes that "the evidence, as I read it, suggests that Jesus was, *from the beginning*, such a one as appropriately to be described in the ways which, sooner or later, he did come to be described in the New Testament period - for instance, as 'Lord' and even, in some sense, as 'God'. Whether such terms in fact began to be used early or late, my contention is that they are not evolved *away*, so to speak, from the original, but represent the development of true insights into the original."[74] This view finds a fuller expression in the work of Dunn, who writes in the conclusion to his recent study of the development of christology:

"We cannot claim that Jesus believed himself to be the incarnate Son of God; but we can claim that the teaching to that effect as it came to expression in the later first-century Christian thought was, in the light of the whole Christ-event, an appropriate reflection on and elaboration of Jesus' own

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[73] Moule 1977:5.

[74] Moule 1977:4. So also France 1982:24; 1995:77; Hengel 1995:369f.

sense of sonship and eschatological mission."[75] Some scholars in this category, while recognizing that the christology of John is significantly different from that of earlier writings, would nonetheless go so far as to say that, were Jesus to read the Gospel of John, he would be pleased with its presentation of who he is and what he did.[76]

The major advantage which this type of explanation has over a syncretistic explanation is that it does justice to the links between the distinctive Johannine motifs and images and earlier christological formulations. While John uses them in different ways, the presence in both John and earlier literature of titles/phrases such as 'Son of Man', and the use of imagery connected with Wisdom, suggests that what we find in John is a more developed form of what earlier Christians said and believed. However, the organic model is at a disadvantage when it comes to explaining why it is that such significant developments occurred. In the case of Brown, we have a scholar who considers on the one hand that christological development is essentially an organic development or an unfolding of the significance of what the earliest Christians believed, yet who on the other hand finds it necessary to find an external catalyst for the developments he sees reflected in the high christology of the Gospel of John. While Brown is heavily indebted to the work of Martyn and largely accepts his thesis, it is on precisely this point that he criticizes him: "he does

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[75] Dunn 1989:254. See also Brown 1985:77f; Witherington 1990:275-277. Brown 1994:102,109 emphasizes the close relation between earlier and later christology, despite his belief (cf. Brown 1979:35-40, and our discussion immediately above) that an influx of Samaritans acted as a catalyst to the development.

[76] So e.g. Brown 1985:77f; Witherington 1990:276f.

not explain why the Christian Jews from the early period developed a christology that led to their expulsion from the synagogue and their becoming Jewish Christians. What was the cause or, at least, the catalyst?"[77]

In other words, earlier Christians were apparently able to remain a part of the synagogue for decades without any major difficulties, whereas the Johannine Christians were expelled precisely because of their christological beliefs. If an explanation in terms of the development of earlier motifs and imagery is going to appear plausible, it will have to offer an explanation of why the Johannine Christians should develop a christology which would lead to their unwilling expulsion from the synagogue. To simply assert that development inevitably occurs seems inadequate in this context. As Hanson writes, "adding a pre-existent dimension consciously declared and a claim to co-eternity and to consubstantiality with the Father was surely more than merely drawing out what was already implicit. John, we must concede, was more than a mere explainer: he was a creative theologian."[78]

Before proceeding, we must consider another recent approach to the question which is best included under the heading of organic approaches. This is the suggestion that the earliest Christians began to include Christ in their worship as a result of their religious experience, and this factor - which was present in Christianity from the beginning and which represents a modification of earlier Jewish practice, but one which is nonetheless derived from Judaism and Jewish-

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[77] Brown 1979:174. A similar point is made by Ashton 1994:73.

[78] Hanson 1991:322. See also Hengel 1989a:104f.

Christianity - led to the development of 'high' christology, which is to be found not only in John but much earlier.[79]

One key difficulty with such an approach is that it appears to play down the differences between, for example, the Synoptics and John. Another problem is the lack of agreement on the definition and character of Jewish worship. Even a conservative scholar such as R. T. France would agree that the term 'worship', when used in relation to the Synoptic Jesus, does not denote an attitude or act of devotion appropriate only for God.[80] And as Dunn has rightly pointed out in response to Hurtado, in the earliest period we do not have hymns *to* Christ, but rather hymns *about* Christ.[81] Further, if Paul's christology had been as contentious for his fellow Jews as was his view of the Law, then we would certainly find some mention of the fact in his letters.[82] This is not to say that Paul and other early Christians did not attribute very exalted status and functions to Jesus, but simply that even some sort of 'worship' in the

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[79] Cf. especially Hurtado 1988:99. Although the Fourth Gospel has not received much direct attention from advocates of this approach (Bauckham 1992 does not mention John's Gospel; Hurtado 1998 mentions verses from it in passing; see also France 1982:34), it is nonetheless included implicitly and/or in passing. The Johannine emphasis on the Paraclete guiding the Christians into new and deeper understandings makes it logical to approach John from this perspective.

[80] France 1982:26f. Cf. also Bauckham 1981:324, and contrast Bauckham 1992:813, whose view needs to be considered in light of the evidence provided in n.81, n.84 and n.85 below.

[81] Dunn 1991b:204f; 1998:257-260; cf. also Hurtado 1988:102f; Hengel 1995:284 (where the translator has apparently rendered the more ambiguous Christuslied with 'song *about* Christ'). Yet see also Bauckham 1992:815, who speaks of hymns which "praise God for his saving acts in the history of Jesus". He points to Eph.5:19 as evidence that early Christians did sing hymns *to* Christ, but it is striking that the author catches himself and adds the qualifying statement of 5:20, which follows the more usual pattern. At any rate, we have at least one hymn to/concerning the Davidic king in the Psalms, which Jews did not feel conflicted with monotheism: Ps. 45, where the Davidic king is perhaps even called 'God'. See also the 'praise' offered to the king in 2 Chr. 23:12.

[82] Dunn 1991b:205f; see also Caird 1976:124.

broadest sense may have been able to be offered to Jesus by Jewish Christians without any feeling that they were departing from their Jewish roots.[83] To offer 'praise' to a ruler does not appear to have been contrary to all Jewish sensibilities (cf. 1 Chr. 29:23-25!),[84] and cultic worship in the full sense - involving sacrifice and the like - was not, to our knowledge, offered to Jesus by early Christians. It is the latter which appears to have been reserved by Jews exclusively for the one true God.[85]

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[83] Cf. Kreitzer 1987:160f.

[84] The verb used for 'worship' in Koine Greek was προσκυνεω, the basic meaning of which is 'to prostate oneself before', and this action was felt to be appropriate to both God and king. See the striking use of the one verb 'worship' to denote an action done to both God and the king (who sits on Yahweh's throne!) in 1 Chr. 29:20,23. As I am grateful to Larry Hurtado for pointing out to me, it is *cultic* worship which appears to be offered to God and to him alone (cf. 1 Chr. 29:21, and our discussion of this point in greater detail in ch.3 below). Cf. further Moule 1977:41,175f; France 1982:26f; Harvey 1982:172. Note also Steenburg 1990:95-98, who discusses Jewish traditions concerning the worship of Adam. He suggests (1990:98-101) that such ideas provided legitimation for the worship of Jesus by Christians. This is important for our present discussion, since Adam is clearly a figure distinct from God, who is nonetheless to be worshipped as 'the image of God'. In the case of angels some did apparently find this sort of attitude towards angels worrying, perhaps because in the case of angels (who were frequently designated as 'gods') there was a greater danger of confusion and of moves in a polytheistic direction. See further Stuckenbruck 1994; also Bauckham 1981. Philo also objected to the custom of prostrating oneself before kings (*Dec.* 64; *Leg. Gai.* 116; cf. Moule 1977:175), here too there being some room for confusion in view of the tendency to regard rulers as divine (the same issue is to the fore in LXX Esther 13:12-14). Nonetheless I know of no evidence of any attempt on the part of the rabbinic authorities to attempt to prohibit or limit the practice. In connection with human figures, Philo clearly appears to be the exception rather than the rule (cf. Moule 1977:175). A further problem is the fact that prostration/worship before Christians is apparently evaluated positively in Rev. 3:9, and a similar point applies to sharing the throne in Rev. 3:21. (See further Kanagaraj 1995:118; also Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge* 79-80). Unfortunately a full treatment of these difficulties lies beyond the scope of the present work.

[85] On this definition of 'cult' see Bultmann 1951:121; also Aune 1972:9-11. This is the type of worship which Jews clearly reserved for God alone (as in 1 Chr. 29:21 - they offered sacrifices to Yahweh and to him alone. I am grateful to Larry Hurtado for drawing this point to my attention). There may of course have been exceptions, but at least as far as we can tell from the existing evidence from this period, the majority of those who classed themselves as Jews seem to have understood the first commandment to exclude the worship of other gods. Cf. further Barclay 1996:429-432, and also ch.3 below.

Another question which must be raised is whether the accounts of heavenly worship - such as we find in Revelation, for example - are more likely to be the *stimulus* for the worship of Christ and for high christology, or to *reflect* beliefs and practices which were already present in the Christian community. While this is not the place to discuss the nature of religious experience, one point which does seem to be corroborated by research in this field is that religious experiences - and more importantly, literary depictions of religious experiences - to a large extent *reflect* the beliefs and social setting of the one having or describing the experience. For example, it is unlikely that the exalted status which Paul attributes to Jesus is exclusively the result of his own personal religious experience, without reflecting early Christian beliefs which others also shared.[86] This is not to say that religious experience does not contribute anything that is genuinely innovative to religion.[87] The problem is that we are dealing with a dialectical, two-way process, with belief influencing experience and experience influencing belief. There is thus a need for great caution in assessing the extent of the influence in either direction in any given case. In the New Testament, we have already noted that the clearest evidence of the worship of Christ alongside God is found in Revelation.[88] In John, there is only one mention of the 'worship' of Jesus, and it is presumably worship in the broad sense of 'bowing down

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[86] So rightly Dunn 1990b:95-97. Cf. also Aune 1972:9; 1983:20,111,275; and Bauckham 1981:331; Hurtado 1988:118f; Rainbow 1991:86f.

[87] See further the discussion in Hurtado 1996:25f.

[88] Cf. esp. Rev. 5:8,13; 14:4; 22:8f.

before', since it provokes no controversy and is not objected to by 'the Jews'. It is thus very possible that the worship of Christ found in Revelation represents a further stage of development beyond (and perhaps building upon) the developments which produced the christology of the Fourth Gospel.[89]

As shall become clear later on, we are not denying the importance of either religious experience or the exalted divine functions and status attributed to Jesus by the earliest Christians as a factor in the development of Christology. The question which remains, however, is why later authors should have felt the need to theorize about such beliefs and practices, when earlier ones felt able to offer their praise to Christ, and to attribute divine functions to Christ, untheoretically. If function automatically implies something about nature and essence,[90] then why should it have taken so long for 'ontological' implications to be drawn? We shall be suggesting below that it is *conflict* over ideas which provides the missing element in this approach: it was probably the fact that some Jews did eventually come to object to ideas of this sort which necessitated that Christians reflect on their beliefs and practices and seek to defend them, which as we shall see below would also have involved developments being made. Thus, we agree that there is much truth in the position

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[89] On the date of Revelation (usually placed in the 90s C.E.) see further Beasley-Murray 1974:32-38; Court 1994:95-103; Aune 1997:lvi-lxx. Some scholars would date the Fourth Gospel to almost the same time (cf. Lindars 1972:42; cp. Brown 1966:lxxx-lxxxvi). The difficulty here is that, in order to determine the relationship between the christologies of John and Revelation, we would need to be able to date not only the written works, but the *ideas* contained therein. Further study of the question of whether there is any influence between the Revelation and the Fourth Gospel, and if so in what direction and to what extent, is certainly required, but unfortunately cannot be undertaken here.

[90] So e.g. France 1982:33-35; cf. also 1995:76f.

and insights of Hurtado and others who take a similar approach, but on its own it does not appear to solve the problem of why Johannine christology developed along the path that it did. Hurtado himself recognizes this, suggesting that 'opposition to the new movement' was also an important stimulus for the Christian 'mutation'.[91] It is this stimulus which we will be exploring further in this study, and which we shall be arguing provides the crucial key to understanding the development of Johannine christology.[92]

1.1.3 Individual Creativity

Scholars in this category do not necessarily deny the continuity between Johannine christology and earlier christology. Nor do they necessarily either affirm or deny that the christology of the Fourth Gospel shows evidence of the influence of non-Jewish modes of thought. What they do stress, however, is that the key reason for the differences between John and other New Testament authors is the unique perspective of the individual who composed the material now found in the Gospel. It is this individual's imagination and viewpoint which have shaped the earlier traditions which he inherited into their present, distinctive form.[93]

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[91] Hurtado 1988:122f.

[92] The worship of Christ obviously did play an important role in the development of christology in later times, on which see Wiles 1967:62-93. See further also our discussion of monotheism and worship in ch.3 below.

[93] Cf. Robinson 1985:298f; Hengel 1989a:103-105. Moloney 1978:255f is a particularly clear example of the compatibility of this view with other perspectives.

Clearly on one level, to attempt to deny the truthfulness of this position would be to deny that the Fourth Gospel had a human author. To accept that an individual human being wrote the Gospel carries with it the corollary that that individual's character has shaped the way he expressed certain ideas, and his choice of certain words and language over others. However, it is questionable whether such an approach can function as a total explanation of the unique emphases of the Fourth Gospel. John shows clear signs of having been written in a context of conflict between a local church and a local Jewish community.[94] The author did not write in isolation, but was part of a community, and it is as much the thought-world and experiences of this community as those of this individual which have affected and shaped the development of the Johannine tradition.[95] As we shall see in the next section, the individual author's contribution is not to be neglected, but what we are seeking to understand are the factors which led that individual to write in the way that he did, i.e. the factors which motivated him to creatively shape the tradition, and the new context and issues which inspired or stimulated him to adapt and apply the tradition as he did.

Thus, while not excluding the importance of the author's own unique contribution, almost every work of literature has one particular author, and this on its own does not answer the question of why Johannine christology developed along the lines that it did, compared with the seemingly more conservative use

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[94] See the evidence presented below, 2.1.

[95] So rightly Cullmann 1976:40. The balance is also maintained well by Moloney 1978:255f; see also Painter 1991:402.

of tradition by other early Christian authors, such as Matthew and Luke. We are looking for another level of explanation.[96] And of course, the important points emphasized by advocates of this approach are not excluded by advocates of others, as we shall see.[97]

1.1.4 Sociological Approaches

In recent times there has been much focus in Johannine scholarship on the community which produced the Gospel, and the ways in which its changing experience shaped the character of the Johannine tradition. An influential figure in sparking off the contemporary interest in the history of the Johannine community as a key to understanding the Gospel is J. L. Martyn. He asks towards the beginning of his trend-setting study, "May one sense even in [the Fourth Gospel's] exalted cadences the voice of a Christian theologian who writes *in response to contemporary events and issues* which concern, or should concern, all members of the Christian community in which he lives?"[98] Martyn answers this question in the affirmative, and thus emphasizes that "when we read the Fourth Gospel, we are listening both to tradition and to a new and unique interpretation of that tradition."[99] Martyn is suggesting that attention to the context in which John wrote, and the needs of the church for which he wrote, can illuminate the question of why the Evangelist wrote as he did. Martyn, however, does not

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[96] Cf. further McGrath 1997d (provisionally p.77).

[97] See the quotation from Martyn immediately below (1.1.4).

[98] Martyn 1979:18.

[99] Martyn 1979:19.

set forth a sociological model to illuminate this process more clearly. We shall thus need to examine those scholars who do make explicit use of sociological categories and tools, in order to evaluate the possibilities of this sort of approach to the Gospel and its potential to illuminate the development of Johannine christology.[100] One of Brown's criticisms of Martyn's work is that he fails to account for the appearance of John's 'high' christology.[101] We shall need to consider whether there is a sociological approach which can in fact do just that.

Before proceeding, it is important to stress from the outset that the term 'Johannine community', at least when used by the present author in connection with his own views, simply means the church community of which the author of the Fourth Gospel was a part and whose experiences are reflected in the Gospel. It does not presume acceptance of a particular reconstruction of the community's history, as our evaluation of a number of such reconstructions will probably have already made clear. In addition, a number of cautionary remarks have been forthcoming from certain scholars, who note that Gospels, unlike letters, were foundation documents which would not be aimed exclusively at the specific contemporary needs of a small group of Christians. As Talbert points out, the problems reflected in the Gospel material may represent not only current issues in the community, but also past issues and issues which are perceived as potential but not actual threats.[102] Some

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[100] This will also help to narrow down our focus in this section, as it is obviously the case that reconstructions such as Brown's, which we examined in our discussion of syncretistic approaches, are also broadly sociological, inasmuch as they are interested in the history of the Johannine community.

[101] See the quotation above, p.35.

[102] Talbert 1992:62f.

scholars have also warned that the isolated communities which recent literature assumes lay behind the Gospels may in fact have been in contact with Christians in many other parts of the Greco-Roman world.[103] These important cautionary remarks need to be taken seriously; however, they do not appear to invalidate the attempt to learn something about the Christian group or groups which produced a particular Gospel. Even today, where mobility and contact between different parts of the world is far greater than in the first century, there can still nonetheless be differences between the issues confronting a church in, for example, New York and Los Angeles, or London and Durham. Even in the same town or city, problems and issues may arise which do not arise in another church. Thus regardless of whether issues reflected in the Gospel were past, present or anticipated future problems, where these issues differ from those found in other Gospels, we may still be justified to conclude that we are dealing with two different streams of Christian thought and experience, reflecting the different needs of different churches or types of churches.[104]

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[103] See especially Bauckham 1998; Barton 1998:189-193. When we speak of the 'Johannine community', we are using a generally accepted shorthand, and are not assuming that this was a sectarian group nor even that it was only one church in one part of the Greco-Roman world.

[104] Although Bauckham 1998 and the other contributions to the same volume appeared after this thesis was essentially completed, it has been felt necessary to address the proposal put forward in this book. In the stronger form argued for by Bauckham it seems very unlikely to be correct: groups such as the Qumran community or the philosophical schools certainly did produce literature whose intended audience was a small circle of like-minded people (cf. Alexander 1998:91,96f,104, for the way that works intended for a small circle of friends nonetheless ended up circulating more widely). The weaker form argued for by other contributors needs to be taken seriously and clearly is correct: Gospels may have been written to put forward a particular group's understanding, but this was not done in isolation from other churches or other types of churches. The present study will support the view that John wrote out of the experience of Jewish-Christian communities in conflict with non-Christian Jews. There is nothing to suggest that they were an isolated sectarian group; rather, they seem to have been in close contact with other streams of tradition in the church. Nonetheless, there is no reason to think that John, however many people he may have hoped would read his book, did not have in mind the needs

1.1.4.1 Synchronic Sociological Approaches

As Stephen Barton points out, whereas traditional historical-critical approaches to the New Testament are *diachronic* (that is, they attempt to trace the development of Christian thought and practice over a period of time), sociological approaches are *synchronic* (that is, they study the function of beliefs and practices at one particular time).[105] We shall return to this point momentarily, but for the present we may note that, if this is correct, then the possibility of a sociological *explanation* of the development of Johannine christology would appear to be excluded *a priori*. This is in fact the conclusion reached by Neyrey, an influential advocate of sociological approaches. He writes,

> The precise origin of the Johannine high Christology continues to remain inaccessible to us. Was it the influx of Samaritans who already acclaimed Moses as a divine figure that led to the conditions in which Jesus could likewise be so acclaimed? Was it wisdom speculation? The text remains mute here, although scholars continue to put this question to the Fourth Gospel. At issue now,

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of his own church(es) and of other churches *in a similar situation and with similar needs* (On Gospel audiences see further Burridge 1998:143f; Barton 1998:194). Bauckham's own book is a useful illustration of our position: it assumes a readership that thinks that Gospels were written for specific communities, and is thus aimed at *New Testament scholars* rather than lay people, for whom this is not an issue. Likewise, even if a scholar hopes that many people will find a textbook he or she has written useful, he or she often nonetheless has his or her own students particularly in view when writing, not to mention his or her own teaching and church experience. We thus support a move away from the view of Gospels reflecting isolated sectarian communities, but in terms of a modification of the consensus rather than a complete rejection or reversal of it. Unfortunately further discussion of this topic is impossible in this context.

[105] Barton 1995:69.

> however, is not the confession's genesis, but rather its meaning and function for those confessing it.[106]

He further writes:

> The genesis of the high christological confession...is neither accessible to us nor is it the focus of this inquiry. Rather, the dominant questions are, What meaning did Jesus' equality with God come to have for Johannine Christians? and, How did it function for them? These questions raise the critical issue of the perspective from which the Fourth Gospel views the high Christology.[107]

Clearly these approaches and methodologies, at least as they are being used by Neyrey and others like him, will not answer the question of how and why Johannine christology developed along the lines that they did. Yet ironically, we shall have occasion to mention another book by Neyrey as an example of an approach which may provide just such an explanation.

1.1.4.2 Diachronic Sociological Approaches

Other scholars advocating a social scientific approach to the New Testament have stressed the need for, and possibility of, a sociological *explanation* of certain New Testament phenomena, or a *diachronic* approach. Among these one may note Richter, who

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[106] Neyrey 1988:96.

[107] Neyrey 1988:97.

writes that "A sociological approach to early Christianity will make use of the explanatory theories and hypotheses of the academic discipline of sociology and will be interested in explaining as well as describing the relevant social data."[108] In this he is followed by Holmberg, who, after quoting Richter, adds, "The important word in this definition is "explain", which means that you proceed beyond description and attempt an understanding of the New Testament data from a distinctive analytical and theoretical perspective on human reality - in this case a sociological one."[109] In this approach, while the concern is still with a particular period of time and with social factors in that specific period, it is being suggested that the *use* to which tradition is put in certain contexts may function as an explanation concerning its development. We may thus say that we are using a *synchronic* methodology or approach to illuminate a larger *diachronic* process, i.e. we are examining social factors in a specific period to see if they can explain why that period produced certain developments. This will become clearer as our discussion progresses.

1.1.4.3 Possible Objections

We must now consider a number of criticisms which have been raised concerning previous attempts at such sociological explanation. For example, it has recently been pointed out by Milbank[110] that sociology deals with what is common to all in a

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[108] Richter 1984:78 (also quoted Holmberg 1990:4f).

[109] Holmberg 1990:5.

[110] Milbank 1990:117f.

particular social context, and this would appear to leave the unique (and for us most interesting) parts of John beyond the pale of what a sociological approach can explain. Yet there is a fallacy here. To assert that a particular author wrote a particular work in response to certain factors in his social context is a valid explanation of the overall content of that work, even though the details of his work and the way he expresses himself will be the result of his own individual character and personality, with the corollary that someone else in the same context would have addressed the same subject matter in a different way. Therefore, once we allow for the creativity of an individual or community as an important factor in the shape of a text, we may still seek a sociological explanation of why they wrote and of the general direction which their work took.[111]

Holmberg also warns of the danger of circular reasoning. Discussing Meeks' article, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism",[112] he writes: "This would seem to be a variant of a circular type of reasoning: first one reconstructs a specific social situation (about which nothing else is known) out of a religious, mainly theological or hortatory text, then one turns around and interprets the meaning of the text with the help of the situation that one now "knows". The only legitimate procedure is to reverse this procedure and work inductively, i.e., to start from sociologically relevant data that exist independently of the theological text, and investigate whether

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[111] Cf. Kysar 1985b:204; McGrath 1997d (as in n.96 above). See also Smith 1984:181-184; Thompson 1988:123; and 1.1.3 above.

[112] Meeks 1986.

they "fit" structures in the symbolical world."[113] Holmberg is right to advocate the explicit use by New Testament scholars of already-existing sociological models, which may then be used to illuminate a text inasmuch as they seem applicable to it. His criticism of circular reasoning is somewhat less valid. This is because, in attempting to interpret a text historically, scholars have no choice but to seek to find clues as to the historical circumstances which gave rise to the text within the text itself, and from these to seek to reconstruct a plausible background for the text, attempting to find points of contact with what is known of the history of that time period from other texts or sources, on which basis it is hoped that other aspects of the text will also be capable of being better understood or explained. The goal of this process is to find a plausible reading of the text which also does justice to, and relates the text to, what may be known of the period from other sources. Holmberg has helpfully pointed out what is being done; however, scholars need to continue using such approaches, while being aware of the dangers and pitfalls of such attempts at historical reconstruction.[114]

A more significant criticism, and one which is in my view valid, comes again from Milbank. He notes, and criticizes, the tendency of recent sociological attempts to 'explain' a text to suggest that a sociological setting somehow existed prior to any religious beliefs, and that those religious beliefs were

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[113] Holmberg 1990:127.

[114] So rightly de Boer 1996:45. See also the cautionary remarks voiced by Meeks and Elliott in Martin 1993:108. See also the similar point made by Esler 1994:12f, that all scholars use models, the only real question being whether such models remain implicit or are made explicit from the beginning.

then 'built on top of' this pre-religious social setting in order to justify or explain it.[115] Milbank is obviously correct to raise such objections, because explanations along these lines clearly do not correspond to reality. Those who are confronted with a change of social circumstances are always also already part of some religious tradition or other.[116] Sociological explanations need to relate social and religious factors in a more holistic way, recognizing that the influence is dialectical rather than unidirectional.

However, Meeks seems to be aware of this. In his aforementioned article he writes, "I do not mean to say that the symbolic universe suggested by the Johannine literature is *only* the reflex or projection of the group's social situation. On the contrary, the Johannine dialogues suggest quite clearly that the order of development must have been dialectical: the christological claims of the Johannine Christians resulted in their becoming alienated, and finally expelled, from the synagogue; that alienation in turn is "explained" by a further development of the christological motifs (i.e., the fate of the community projected onto the story of Jesus); these developed christological motifs in turn drive the group into further isolation. It is a case of continual, harmonic reinforcement between social experience and ideology."[117] A sociological approach which is aware that there can be no ultimate

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[115] Milbank 1990:114,117.

[116] Berger 1967:47; Esler 1994:10. This is particularly the case in the ancient world; a generalization of this source is obviously less valid in a modern secular context, although since 'religion' and 'ideology/philosophy' are often overlapping categories, perhaps even atheistic materialism is a 'religion' of a sort.

[117] Meeks 1986:164.

distinction between 'society' and 'religion' as independent and unrelated spheres, and thus deals with what we might call 'socio-religious' phenomena, does not appear to be subject to the criticisms raised by Milbank.

Yet Meeks does not appear to answer the question raised in one of his later articles on John concerning an earlier stage in the development of Johannine christology: "What drove the Johannine Christians to make just these connections [between Jesus and figures whom the Jews used to explain appearances of the invisible God], in the face of the social pain that it obviously cost them?"[118] However, he hints that here too social factors will be an important part of any explanation. Can the dialectic between ideology and social setting explain the earlier stages of the development of Johannine Christology as well? Holmberg thinks that it can, and that while social factors do not explain the *origins* of beliefs, they can explain the new *uses* to which beliefs and traditions are put, and the way that they are developed in the process. Holmberg writes: "I think that Meeks and others are quite correct in observing that one and the same belief complex could be put to several, quite different uses in the overall task of consolidating the symbolic universe and the social world of the early Christians. If we allow an unwieldy word for this, it could be termed the multifunctionality of beliefs. This multifunctionality also has to do with the dialectical use these central beliefs were put to. Probably many meanings evolved only when the social situation called for a new

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[118] Meeks 1990:318.

interpretation or deeper understanding of the faith that had already been transmitted and received."[119]

1.2 The Approach to be Taken in this Study

What is being hinted at by a number of the authors we have mentioned thus far is that the interplay between social factors and religious beliefs in the dialectical manner we have indicated can explain why religious beliefs develop and take on new forms. This suggestion needs to be taken seriously, since it appears to provide a way out of the long-standing stalemate between the syncretistic and organic models of development we have discussed earlier: an explanation which suggests neither simply the influence of other ideologies on doctrine, nor a simple, self-explanatory growth from seed to flower, but an interaction between belief and environment which calls forth apologetic responses, which involve and result in development in the very doctrines which are being defended.[120] In other words, a sociological approach is able to treat more fully developed doctrines precisely as developments of what was already there in the tradition, while also indicating an external stimulus which can be appealed to as an explanation of

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[119] Holmberg 1990:138.

[120] Cf. McGrath 1998a:41f. This is also hinted at in Hurtado 1988:122f. It is somewhat ironic that Neyrey 1985:270f takes this view, and yet fails to find in it the key to an explanation of the development of Johannine christology. See also Dowell 1990; 1992 for a further move in this general direction, although presupposing direct use and redaction of the Synoptics by John. De Boer 1996 only reached me after this work was essentially complete. It too represents a move in the right direction; it is nonetheless felt that the present work's explicit use of the model of legitimation, and our decision to trace the development of themes, motifs and ideas rather than of the literary history of the Gospel, will allow for more secure conclusions. Yet De Boer's book is an extremely important one, and as it is limited to the theme of the death of Jesus, we eagerly await the application of his insights to other aspects of the Fourth Gospel.

why development occurs. This is an intriguing suggestion, but in order to provide a plausible alternative approach to the christology of Fourth Gospel this suggestion will have to be validated by a sociological model.

The relevant model is to be found in the work of Berger and Luckmann in the area of the sociology of knowledge.[121] Berger and Luckmann begin their work by describing how a worldview is a social construction, a human creation which nevertheless, once it is in place, confronts the individual as something objective. The second chapter of the book discusses legitimation, which can be described as 'worldview maintenance', in that this term refers to the ways in which worldviews are defended or reinforced in response to challenges from alternative understandings of the world, whether from other societies or from 'heretics' within the society itself. A deviant definition of reality challenges the legitimacy of a worldview, and legitimation is the procedure of maintaining and defending the plausibility of that worldview.[122]

To quote from the section of Berger and Luckmann's book most relevant for our current purposes, "Historically, the problem of heresy has often been the first impetus for the

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[121] Berger and Luckmann 1967; see also Berger 1967.

[122] The work of Berger and Luckmann has already been taken up by P. F. Esler for use in the study of Acts. Holmberg writes, summarizing Esler's use of this sociological model (Holmberg 1990:101f): "In order to understand and explain the change that has taken place between the inception of Christianity as a reform movement and its existence as a separate sect in the later decades of the first century, one needs a sociological model concerning how sects originate and develop. A model contains an idea of what probably, or usually, or inevitably happens with the phenomena that are held together in the theory, and of how a change in one of the elements will affect the other elements, and can be described as "a related group of conceptualized phenomena with a 'mechanism', an inner dynamic, which has an explanatory and predictive function" [Esler 1987:50]." Esler's work testifies to the ability of such a model to provide an explanation of the specific emphases of a text.

systematic theoretical conceptualization of symbolic universes...As in all theorizing, new theoretical implications within the tradition itself appear in the course of this process, and the tradition itself is pushed beyond its original form in new conceptualizations...In other words, the symbolic universe is not only legitimated but also modified by the conceptual machineries to ward off the challenge of heretical groups within a society."[123]

1.2.1 An Outline of the Proposed Sociological Model

We may here present in outline form the model which Berger and Luckmann have formulated. Once we have done so, we may test its applicability by using it to consider briefly another period of christological development in the church's history. The legitimation model essentially proposes that conflict over ideas provokes the need for legitimation, and the process of legitimation causes those ideas to develop and be worked out in greater detail and intricacy. This may be outlined as follows:

Stage 1: Initial Diversity

Berger and Luckmann refer to contact with both external and internal groups that hold to a different set of beliefs than the group being studied.[124] Both situations presuppose that a group is being confronted with an

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[123] Berger and Luckmann 1967:125. The term 'heresy' here implies an alternative view of reality which arises from within a group and threatens the stability of its particular worldview.

[124] Berger and Luckmann 1967:122-126. Wiles 1967:19 (quoted below, pp.59f) also refers to the same two types of encounter, the challenge from within and from without.

alternative worldview. In the case of external contact, the differences may be due to the development of cultures in geographical and linguistic isolation from one another for great lengths of time prior to the contact. In the case of internal contact - which is of greater interest to us in our present study, as it seems more applicable to the Fourth Gospel - the diversity will most likely be due to certain ambiguities in the tradition or worldview which is shared by both sub-groups, such as ambiguous aspects of the teaching of community's founder or of the community's authoritative scriptures, which may then be interpreted in different ways by different individuals or groups within the society.

Stage 2: Contact and Conflict

However the two different worldviews, or interpretations of the same worldview, arose, once they come into contact with one another,[125] the objective, 'taken for grantedness' of both sides' ideologies will be challenged. This will provoke a reaction of some sort from both sides, most likely in some form of conflict, as

[125] This contact can come about in numerous different ways. In cases of external conflict, two main factors are migration of people groups and conquest by other nations. In cases of internal conflict, someone proposes a different interpretation of his or her own traditional worldview, which meets with acceptance from some within the community but rejection by others. In the case of post-70 Judaism in which John was written, the situation seems to have been one in which there had been for a very long time different interpretations and 'sects', which existed in tension with one another. Intense conflict arose when one of the various parties began to play a leading role in some local Jewish communities, and sought to exclude other interpretations of Judaism which were felt to threaten their own interpretation and their own authority.

well as an attempt by both sides to demonstrate the validity of their own view of reality over against that of their opponents.

Stage 3: Legitimation

The contact and conflict will necessitate some form of attempt at legitimation by both groups. In the case of internal conflict, both sides will frequently seek to prove from their shared scriptures and traditions that they are the true preservers of their worldview and heritage. Watson sets out conveniently in three points his view of how a sect legitimates its split from its parent: (a) denunciation of the opponents, (b) antithesis (between them and us, believers and unbelievers, saved and unsaved), and (c) reinterpretation of the religious traditions of the parent community so that they apply exclusively to the sect.[126] These three aspects of legitimation seem to be equally valid in the conflict stage, prior to there being any kind of definitive 'split' between the two groups, although certain features (in particular antithesis) may be more marked in the wake of such a split or expulsion.

Whatever ideology or doctrine may be at the centre of the conflict, each group will need to engage in legitimation/apologetic[127] for its view. This legitimation

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[126] Watson 1986:40.

[127] Esler 1987:205-219 distinguishes more sharply than the present writer between *apologetic* (a defence of belief aimed at those outside the community with the intention of converting them) and *legitimation* (a defense of belief designed to reinforce the faith of those who already

will involve the drawing of analogies, the use of proof texts (and the finding of new proof texts, or the relating of authoritative texts to issues/situations to which they had not previously been applied), and other similar means of formulating supporting arguments. Such attempts to defend one's own view will also inevitably involve the thinking through more fully of the implications of beliefs already held, and will often cause earlier beliefs to be understood in new ways. To draw an analogy, just as when a building is reinforced substantial additions and changes are made to the structure under the guise of the defence or maintenance of the original building, so also attempts to reinforce or defend beliefs will result in additions to and developments of that belief.[128] Thus the end result will be a more fully developed ideology, the existence of which could not have been foreseen prior to the conflict.[129]

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belief). The present author has not done so for several reasons: many works serve (and are intended to serve) both purposes; works of apologetic in Esler's sense are still read more often by those within the community than those outside, and thus in practice do more to legitimate the worldview of believers than to convert unbelievers; the arguments used in both types of work are in most instances the same or very similar, so that it often is difficult to discern the purpose of a document so precisely unless an explicit statement of purpose is made (the one made in John 20:31 may be taken either way, depending partly on which reading was original). At any rate, both processes spur doctrinal development, as Wiles 1967:19 notes.

[128] Cf. McGrath 1998a:42 where we have used the same analogy.

[129] It is worth mentioning that, since 'legitimation' is a dynamic process, our use of the term will reflect this: In the specific case of John's Gospel, we see that legitimation *leads* to the development of Johannine beliefs, and yet the *outcome* of that development is itself a legitimation of earlier beliefs. 'Legitimation' can thus refer to the process of defending/developing, and to the defence/development produced by this process.

1.2.2 Historical Example: The Early Church

Before examining the Fourth Gospel from this perspective, we may illustrate this model through a consideration of the way in which this process can be seen to be at work in another period of the church's history. The most logical period to turn to is the period of doctrinal development in the first few centuries of the post-New Testament period, those which led to the formulation of the creeds, since this is actually an example which Berger and Luckmann appeal to in order to illustrate the legitimation process. "For instance, the precise Christological formulations of the early church councils were necessitated not by the tradition itself but by the heretical challenges to it. As these formulations were elaborated, the tradition was maintained and expanded at the same time. Thus there emerged, among other innovations, a theoretical conception of the Trinity that was not only unnecessary but actually non-existent in the early Christian community."[130] This same thesis has been put forward by Maurice Wiles as an explanation of doctrinal development in this period, albeit without the explicit use of sociological categories or models. Wiles writes of

> three outstanding motives by which the church was led on along the path of doctrinal development. These can be defined epigrammatically as the Church's self-understanding in relation to those outside, in relation to those half outside and half inside her borders, and finally in relation to herself. First was the apologetic

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[130] Berger and Luckmann 1967:125.

> motive, the need to express Christian truth in a form that would meet the requirements and answer the objections of the surrounding world. Secondly, there was the problem of heresy, the problem of those who, standing to a greater or lesser degree within the fold of the Church, yet defined the tenets of the faith in a manner which seemed to the majority wrong-headed and dangerously misleading. Thirdly (though never in isolation from the other two, since no thought is unrelated to its environment), there was the natural desire of some Christians to think out and to think through the implications of their faith as deeply and as fully as possible.[131]

Examples of conflict leading to doctrinal development abound.[132] However, since our concern is primarily with christology, we may turn to an example from this field to illustrate our model. We can see in the Logos concept in Judaism, and then in early Christianity which inherited it, an essential ambiguity: the Logos (or Wisdom) is said to be both none other than God himself in his interaction with the world, and yet also separate from and subordinate to God.[133] Discussions of the subject were postponed by Irenaeus, who appealed to Scripture in order to argue that no human being could claim to understand the origins and 'generation' of the Logos.[134] Others, however,

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[131] Wiles 1967:19.

[132] Cf. the many examples discussed in Wiles 1967, *passim*.

[133] Cf. Dunn 1989:168-212,215-247.

[134] Irenaeus, *Adv.Haer*.2.28.6.

were not satisfied with this approach, and two emphases arose, one seeking to preserve monotheism by accentuating the subordination of the Logos, the other seeking to preserve both monotheism and the divinity of the Logos by emphasizing that the Logos is in fact none other than God. These two streams came into conflict, a conflict which came to a head in particular during the Arian controversy. This controversy has been aptly described as the *search* for the Christian doctrine of God,[135] since there was as yet no definitive answer to the questions which had been raised, and both sides could and did appeal to tradition and Scripture in support of their views. The Arians pointed to the language of Wisdom having been created, and of Jesus as the 'firstborn', whereas the Nicenes pointed to the fact that the Word was God, and that Christ was said to be 'before all things'. The most important point for our purposes is that both sides developed christologies which went beyond anything that had previously existed, and that this was due largely to the fact that ambiguities in the church's christological tradition led to conflict, which in turn instigated and necessitated doctrinal development.[136]

It thus appears that doctrinal formulations are frequently an attempt to define an aspect of one's beliefs in relation to the formulations or views of others. Apologetic and conflict may thus be said to provide one of the major stimuli to such development. And in this process of development, the possible directions are limited and determined by such factors

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[135] Hanson 1988.

[136] A much more detailed treatment of this subject may be found in Wiles 1967:30-36 and *passim*.

as Scripture, tradition, worship and practice.[137] If we know something of the starting point and finishing point of a period in the Church's doctrinal development, as well as that during the period in question debates were taking place in connection with certain doctrines, the latter may be appealed to as the stimulus of the former, allowing one to understand *why* doctrine developed in the direction it did during that period of the Church's history.[138]

1.2.3 Applying the Model to the Fourth Gospel

We have now seen a clear historical example of the phenomenon which Berger and Luckmann describe in their work, and there can be little doubt that their overall thesis is applicable to and does justice to the development of christology in the early church. However, we have yet to demonstrate that the model is equally applicable to the Gospel of John.

To begin with, we may note that there is now a growing consensus that the Gospel of John reflects a conflict between

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[137] Wiles 1967:162.

[138] We may consider briefly another example, taken from the period prior to the rise of Christianity, namely the Maccabean conflict and the developments surrounding it. There are a number of important documents stemming from this period, albeit from only one side of the conflict. Segal (1986:31-34) suggests that the parties involved in the conflict of this period were similar to the Orthodox and Reform Judaisms of today. One sought to make concessions to modernity in order to be relevant, by neglecting concern with what were considered not to be core elements of Judaism, while the other felt that any concessions which involved neglecting commandments were a violation and denial of the covenant. Both positions were sincere. The two viewpoints both presumably appealed to scripture in their defense, and both were emphasizing something which was there in the scriptures. These two viewpoints came into conflict, perhaps also in connection with conflict over political authority. As the reform group came into power and sought to enforce its views, those who opposed their views rebelled. The elements neglected by the reformers were predominantly the laws in relation to circumcision, food and purity, and it is because of this conflict that we suddenly find in Judaism, in the wake of this conflict, that these issues feature as the key symbols of Jewish identity and faithfulness to the covenant. Ideology and religious belief was in this instance clearly shaped and developed by conflict (For further on this cf. Hengel 1974:305-309).

the Johannine Christians and the synagogue. This consensus is due largely to the work of Martyn, and this view is accepted also by Ashton, Brown, Dunn, Fortna, Meeks, Moloney, Painter, Smith, von Wahlde, Whitacre and others. There also seems to be sufficient evidence within the Gospel for us to be reasonably certain what was at stake in this conflict: christology. Again and again, the question of belief in Jesus is raised, and frequently in the context of conflict: Does being Moses' disciple prevent or encourage one to become Jesus' disciple? How dare the Johannine Christians claim divine prerogatives for Jesus? Such issues lie at the heart of the Gospel and of the conflict which gave rise to it. We shall consider the evidence for such a conflict more fully in the next chapter.[139]

Most scholars are moving towards a consensus on the broader setting of this conflict, and relate it in some way to the attempt by certain post-70 rabbis to give a new impetus and programme to Judaism.[140] During this period, Judaism was seeking to find ways of coping with the destruction of the Temple and of nationalistic hopes, and many groups within pre-70 Judaism, in particular those whose identity was largely tied to the Temple, ceased to exist as distinct parties. The remaining

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[139] Dunn 1991b:222f points out the preeminence of these two issues, and they will form the focus of Parts 2 and 3 of this thesis.

[140] Martyn's attempt to relate the Gospel of John directly to the council of Jamnia and more specifically to the *Birkat ha-Minim* has met with much criticism. This study does not presuppose any direct link with the actual council at Jamnia, but only that the Johannine Christians had been part of a Jewish community where Pharisaic rabbis had a sufficient degree of authority and power to exclude opponents from the local synagogue. For further on this issue see Wengst 1981:37-73; Meeks 1985:94-104 (although Meeks too quickly discounts the references to 'the Pharisees' as traditional; in fact, John occasionally adds a reference to the Pharisees where such a reference is lacking in parallel passages in the other Gospels); Manns 1991:488-509; de Boer 1996:69. For challenges to Martyn's reading of the evidence concerning the Birkat ha-Minim see especially Kimelman 1981; Katz 1984; Robinson 1985:72-81; Esler 1987:55; Stibbe 1992:56-61.

groups each had different views and emphases on major issues, and in areas where the Pharisaic rabbis began to come into greater power, they set about promoting their understanding of Judaism, and excluding others which they felt threatened their authority and their ideology. It is in this context that the Johannine Christians most likely came into conflict with the leaders of their synagogue.[141] This is, of course, not to return to the idea of 'orthodoxy' which we have already seen is no longer tenable in reference to this period. Rather, we are speaking about a particular group, which has sufficient authority to do so in a particular area or community, attempting to exclude others who do not agree with their position, and to define and enforce their own position as normative. This is thus a continuation of the process of Jewish sectarian controversies which existed even in the pre-70 period.[142]

Dunn asks concerning the Fourth Gospel, "Why should the confession of Jesus as Messiah *now* provoke such a confrontation between Jesus and (the leaders of) 'the Jews'?", to which he replies, "Most likely the answer is two-fold. (1) The Christian claims for Jesus were being pressed or expressed with such force at this time that christology became an issue as never before, making it impossible for other Jews to remain agnostic about these claims; and (2) they were met by a rabbinic Judaism

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[141] Cf. the excellent brief statement in Painter 1991:23 (see also 1991:53f).

[142] Cf. Smith 1995:171. Overman 1990:38-43 describes Jamnia as 'the beginning of the end of sectarianism', which is a helpful way of putting it, although it must be remembered that the disappearance of sectarianism in the post-70 period did not produce a monolithic, uniform Judaism, and rabbinic Judaism would still only slowly come to dominate through a long process lasting several centuries.

beginning to draw its own boundaries more tightly around 'Judaism'. *A Christianity which was continuing to push back the older boundaries was met by a Judaism trying to draw in the same boundaries more tightly*. The almost inevitable result was a split, a parting of the ways."[143]

The relationship of the Johannine community to the first two stages in our model is much easier to determine than its relationship to the third stage. This is because in any attempt to reconstruct the process of development in the community's christology, theories and hypotheses will inevitably need to be put forward and discussed concerning the stages in the composition of the Gospel, and the relationship of the fully developed Johannine christology to the christology evidenced in earlier documents (and also in earlier strata of the Gospel, where such can be delineated). It would be unwise in a study of this sort to tie our conclusions too closely to any particular source theory. A better methodology would appear to be an examination of the sorts of christological motifs and imagery which appear to have been the general inheritance of early Christianity. This is not to imply that the Gospel of John had direct, literary knowledge of Pauline teaching, for example, or of the Synoptic Gospels, but simply that certain traditions about Jesus and christological imagery such as are preserved in

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[143] Dunn 1991b:222. See also again Painter 1991:23. Perhaps one reason for the increased opposition to the Christians' messianic claims was the post-war situation. Rabbinic tradition suggests that R. Yohanan ben Zakkai only received permission to gather the rabbis at Jamnia because he had opposed the Jewish revolt and was a 'friend of Caesar', and thus Christian claims may have been felt to be in danger of bringing the wrath of the Roman authorities onto the whole Jewish community (cf. John 11:37-50). Nonetheless, there is also evidence of an increase in messianic fervour in the post-70 period, and some may have opposed Christians because they claimed that a man killed by the Romans was the Messiah.

these documents were known also to John. That this was the case does not appear to be in any way controversial,[144] and we shall in each instance make a case for John's knowledge of the earlier tradition(s) in question.

In attempting to relate the Fourth Gospel to this stage of our model, we have certain fixed factors which prevent us from wandering into unchecked speculation. First, we have the final form of the Gospel, which not only shows the result[145] of the development, but also apologetic arguments which may provide some clues as to the course of the controversy and the issues which were at stake. Texts frequently also contain 'fossils' of earlier stages in the history of a community and its belief. We also have much evidence throughout the rest of the New Testament concerning earlier stages of christology, which are important in that many of the motifs found therein appear in a more developed form in the Fourth Gospel.[146] Functions attributed to Jesus in earlier literature are often backed up and justified by a theoretical (in some instances one could perhaps almost say 'ontological') foundation when they appear in John. Whether or not earlier christology can be related to the Johannine christology by means of the model we

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[144] See further the seminal study in this field, Dodd 1963, *passim*. It seems safest to assume for the purpose of this study that John did not make direct use of any other New Testament document. Those who are convinced that John made direct use of one or more of the written Synoptic Gospels will find it much easier to accept our arguments about John's dependence on certain earlier traditions. However, even if John did not know these works in their written form (and I have yet to find any decisive and unambiguous evidence that he did), he still shows an awareness of Synoptic type traditions, and thus our argument can stand independently of this other, rather controversial issue. On the relationship between John and Paul cf. Bultmann 1955:6-10.

[145] It would be unwise to refer to the Gospel as the *end* result, since development continued even after the Gospel was written.

[146] Cf. our discussion of this point in some detail below, 2.2.

have proposed can only be determined by means of detailed exegesis, and this will be our concern throughout the rest of this thesis. For now, it is sufficient to point out that, even though we are (as discussed earlier) moving from text to background and back again, we do have certain firm data in which our exploration is rooted.

Before proceeding, we may engage in some final 'legitimation' of the model we have chosen. In addition to its advantages in doing justice to the best aspects of other models of development, it also avoids the tendency in previous Johannine scholarship to regard the Johannine christology as either the *cause* of the Johannine Christians' expulsion from the synagogue or the *result* of their expulsion. Once again, we are in a situation where an either/or dichotomy will not do justice to the complexity of the situation:[147] the Johannine Christians already held christological beliefs when they first came into conflict with the leaders of their Jewish community; this conflict in turn provoked developments in their christology, which provoked further conflict, and so on.[148] It is obviously not new to suggest a link between Johannine christology and conflict with the Jews, but the complexities of the process of this development merit further study, and an adequate model for tracing this development has long been

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[147] So rightly Painter 1991:58.

[148] Although Meeks 1986:164 seems to be aware of this dialectical process, in practice his studies have not always done adequate justice to the issue of already existing christological beliefs, thus leaving him open to the charge of reductionism. See Meeks 1990:318f, where he hints at a sociological solution to the earlier stages of Johannine christological development, but fails in the end to solve the problem of why the Johannine Christians adopted 'high' christological language in the first place. Our model has the potential to pick up where Meeks' work has left off.

required. The application of Berger and Luckmann's model to the subject at hand appears therefore to have the potential to clarify a number of methodological questions, and to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding of the process(es) which led to the formation of John's christology.

1.3 Summary and Aims

The remainder of this study will be devoted to the application of this sociological model to John's Gospel, and we may now proceed to an exegesis of specific texts in the light of the model of legitimation. A discussion of the entire Gospel in detail is impossible within the limited space of this study, and therefore an attempt has been made to choose for discussion texts which reflect conflict between Jesus (or the Johannine community) on the one hand and 'the Jews' on the other, and which also contain important christological affirmations. A brief justification is provided at the start of each chapter for the inclusion of the text under discussion.

In this first chapter we have reviewed previous scholarship on Johannine christological development, and presented the model of legitimation and development which we shall be using to study John's christology. In the chapter which follows we shall present and consider the evidence in John for a conflict between the Johannine Christians and a local synagogue of which they had once been a part, and also the points of similarity and difference between the motifs which are found in John and those found in earlier Christian writings. In part three (chapters 3-8) we shall seek to apply the model of legitimation to the question of the relationship

between Jesus and God, and in part four (chapters 9-13), we shall consider the debate over the relationship between Jesus and Moses and their respective revelations. Throughout parts three and four we shall be seeking to determine in what ways the conflicts and debates in these areas stimulated the development of certain christological traditions and ideas, as the Evangelist made creative use of them in his defence of Christian beliefs. Chapter 14 will approach several other related issues in the same way. Chapter 15 will attempt to determine whether the various developments that resulted from this process were integrated by the Evangelist into a unified and coherent portrait of Christ. Finally, the conclusion will seek to summarize our findings and draw together their implications and significance.

In order to demonstrate that we are correct in our initial hypothesis that John's distinctive christological developments are part of his work of legitimation, we shall need to establish several points: First, we must show that there are indicators that John is engaging in legitimation: in most of the passages we shall be considering there will be clear and explicit signs of this, such as the narrative following the form of objections being raised by 'the Jews' which the Johannine Jesus then directly addresses; in others, however, the indicators are less explicit, such as the presence of polemical language and connections with themes which are used by John in his legitimation elsewhere in the Gospel. Second, we must show that the focus of the debate is on issues which are *pre*-Johannine: if the focus in the debates with 'the Jews' is on distinctively Johannine formulations, then we

cannot explain the emergence of those distinctive christological ideas in terms of a phenomenon connected with the attempt to respond to objections raised to those beliefs. If, on the other hand, we can demonstrate that the beliefs being disputed are *pre*-Johannine, then a case can be made that the distinctively Johannine elements are part of an attempt to respond to the objections raised to these earlier beliefs. Third, having shown that the beliefs which are the focus of controversy are essentially the same as beliefs current in earlier times, we must also demonstrate that the elements of the Johannine presentation of Christ in the passages being considered are developments out of earlier beliefs, and that these distinctively Johannine developments are best understood as an attempt to respond to objections to Christian christological beliefs in the ways we have outlined in the present chapter.[149]

Thus in outline form our aim is to:

(1) Provide evidence that the evangelist is engaging in legitimation.

(2) Provide evidence that the debate centres on beliefs which were part of the wider heritage of early Christianity,

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[149] It should be noted that, in view of the fact that we are focusing specifically on John's development of *christological* traditions, and that we are not assuming a direct knowledge by John of any other specific document, we will not, for the most part, be focusing on specific details which are different between, for example, John's account of an event and an apparently parallel narrative in the Synoptics. Rather, our focus will be on John's development of motifs and imagery. Obviously those who feel more certain about John's direct literary dependence on other New Testament writings will feel able to engage in socio-redaction criticism to a fuller extent than we will be attempting to do in this study.

i.e. beliefs which are early Christian rather than distinctively Johannine.

(3) Show that the Evangelist's portrait of Christ in these contexts represents a development out of and based on earlier Christian beliefs (including, but not limited to, those included under point (2)).[150]

(4) Make a strong case that, in view of the evidence for controversy and legitimation, and the connections with earlier beliefs, the Evangelist is, in the passage in question, attempting to defend certain beliefs, by engaging in legitimation in the ways we have outlined earlier, and that the combined evidence suggests that legitimation provides the stimulus for, and thus the best explanation of, the course of development followed by Johannine christology.

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[150] In which contexts frequent reference will be made back to the evidence which has been presented in chapter two.

CHAPTER 2

A CONFLICT SETTING AND A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTOLOGY: SETTING THE STAGE

2.1 The Conflict Setting

2.1.1 Conflict Passages in the Fourth Gospel

In recent scholarship it has become widely accepted that behind the Fourth Gospel lies a debate between a group of Christian Jews and the leaders of their local synagogue,[1] the main focus of which was christology. It will be useful, before discussing our topic further, to survey some of the evidence for such a conflict. We may take as our starting point the clearest evidence, namely the hostility and objections expressed by characters in the Fourth Gospel who function as opponents of Jesus. In John 5:16, reference is made to 'the Jews' persecuting Jesus, and in 5:18 we are told that they tried (even harder) to kill him.[2] The reason which is given for this antagonism is christological: he was 'making himself equal with God'. In John 6 we also find the group described as 'the Jews' 'grumbling' (v41) in response to Jesus' claim to have 'come down from heaven', and 'arguing among themselves' (v52) in response to Jesus' words about eating his flesh. Even his disciples found this teaching difficult, and many subsequently no longer followed him (6:60f,66). In 8:59 we are told of an

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[1] So e.g. Ashton, Brown, De Jonge, Dunn, Fortna, Kysar, Manns, Martyn, Meeks, Painter, Pancaro, Renner, Schnackenburg, Setzer, Wengst and Whitacre.

[2] Harder than *what* is not clear; the reason for this aporia is irrelevant to the present discussion.

attempt by 'the Jews' to stone Jesus, which is once again in response to a christological claim made by the Johannine Jesus, namely the application of the divine name 'I am' by Jesus to himself.[3] Similarly, in 10:31 we are told of another attempt by 'the Jews' to stone Jesus; here the reason which is given is a charge of blasphemy, the focus of which is once again christological: the charge is made that Jesus, a mere man, claims to be God. In 11:53 and 12:10f we are told of a plot on the part of the chief priests and the Sanhedrin to kill Jesus (see also 7:25).

Further evidence of conflict, and of the issues which were central to it, are to be found on the lips of the Johannine 'Jews'. The Pharisees disparage those who believe in Jesus, pointing out that none of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in him, but only 'this mob that knows nothing of the Law' (7:48), who have been deceived (7:47), since the/a prophet does not come from Galilee (7:52). The Pharisees also challenge him because he bears witness to himself, and such testimony they consider invalid (8:13). We also hear of some among 'the crowd' saying that Jesus deceives the people (7:12) or that he is demon possessed (7:20). 'The Jews' make a similar assertion in 8:48,52, regarding Jesus as a demon-possessed Samaritan. That christology is to the fore here as well is clear from the fact that they ask whether Jesus is greater than Abraham, and ask him, "Who do you make yourself out to be?" (8:53). A similar emphasis is expressed in 10:20.

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[3] That the divine name is in view in the absolute use of 'I am' in John is widely accepted. Cf. e.g. Odeberg 1929:308-310; Dodd 1953:93-96; Brown 1966:533-538; Beasley-Murray 1987:139; Moloney 1989:1423; Perkins 1989:948; Setzer 1990:180; Carson 1991:358. See also our discussion in 5.2 below.

The Pharisees/'Jews' are also presented as deciding to expel from the Synagogue anyone who regards Jesus as the Messiah (9:22), because they regard Jesus as a sinner who does not keep the Sabbath (9:16). They class themselves as Moses' disciples rather than Jesus', because they know that God spoke to Moses, but do not know where Jesus is from (9:28f). Here the issue of whether Jesus is a righteous man who is worthy to be listened to, or a sinner and a deceiver, is raised, as is that of how Jesus' teaching relates to Moses'. References to expulsion from the Synagogue also appear in 12:42 and 16:2.

There are also other indicators of a conflict setting, found expressed either in the words of the narrator or placed on the lips of the Johannine Jesus. 'The Jews' are called children of the devil (8:44) and liars (8:55). Jesus warns his disciples that they will meet with persecution of various sorts (15:18-21,25; 16:2f). We may also note that everywhere Jesus goes, people are divided because of him (6:66-69; 7:12,43; 9:16; 10:19-21; cf. also 1:5,10-13). Language suggesting conflict also appears in the prologue, which sets the overall mood of the Gospel: there is reference to light/darkness dualism (1:5), to God's own creation and special nation not receiving the Logos (1:10f). Opposition to Jewish claims concerning their special election or privileges may be in view in 1:13,17f. Imagery contrasting light and darkness, above and below, pervades the entire Gospel from beginning to end. The language of explicit or implicit polemic clearly abounds throughout the whole of the Fourth Gospel.[4]

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[4] Further discussion of the Johannine polemical passages can be found in Whitacre 1982:5-119.

2.1.2 Issues in the Conflict with the Synagogue

In even the briefest of examinations of those texts which we have set out in the previous section, it becomes clear not only that there was a conflict between the Johannine Christians and the (leaders of the) Synagogue, but also that the conflict focused primarily on the christological claims which the Johannine Christians were making for Jesus. This evidence suggests that Berger and Luckmann's model of legitimation, which we have discussed in chapter one, has the potential to illuminate our understanding of Johannine Christology. However, before we attempt to use this sociological model to study the Fourth Gospel, it will be useful to set forth briefly here the main issues that appear to have been to the fore in the conflict.

(1) Jesus and God

A key issue in John's Gospel is the question of the relationship of Jesus to God, and whether the exalted claims made for him are legitimate or not (5:18; 8:58f; 10:32). What exactly is at issue will be clarified in the course of our treatment of this aspect of the conflict.[5]

(2) Jesus and Moses/Torah

We also find in John a debate about the relationship of Jesus to Moses, and the qualifications Jesus had to reveal things that Moses could or did not reveal (1:17f; 3:10-13; 5:37-40,45-47; 6:32; 9:28f). The accusation that Jesus is a 'sinner', who

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[5] See below Part 2 and esp. ch. 3.

does not keep the Sabbath, also appears (5:16; 9:16). This last point is subsumed under this heading because it is ultimately about whether Jesus obeys Torah, and whether his teaching is in accordance with Torah.

(3) Jesus and Other Figures

The question of his relationship to Jacob (1:51; 4:12f) and to Abraham (8:33-40,53-58) is also raised, as is his relationship to the Temple (2:19-21; 4:21-24) and other Jewish institutions and feasts (e.g., 2:6ff; 5:8-17; 7:37f; 8:12). His relationship to John the Baptist is also an issue (1:6-8,15,20-34; 3:25-36; 10:40-42).

(4) The Messiahship of Jesus

The question of whether Jesus was the Messiah, i.e. of whether any christological understanding of Jesus is valid at all, is present in several places (1:41f; 4:25f,29; 7:26f,31,41f; 9:22; 10:24). The idea of a crucified Messiah was also problematic to the Jews of John's time (12:34), as it presumably was even earlier.

It is possible that these issues were to the fore at different times in the community's history. However, in the present study we will not be attempting to separate redactional layers in the Fourth Gospel in any detail, although in the course of our study we shall note any evidence that may indicate whether these issues were the focus of controversy at the same time or successively. For the time being, however, it is sufficient to have set forth the available evidence

concerning the issues which were to the fore in the Johannine conflict situation, before moving on to seek to demonstrate that the distinctive Johannine development of the Christian tradition is the result of John's legitimation of the beliefs which he and his community held dear.

2.2 The Distinctive Features of Johannine Christology

It is also important, before proceeding further, to consider some of the major elements of the Gospel's christology which are distinctively Johannine, and to mention aspects of similarity and difference between John's portrait of Jesus and that preserved in earlier Christian sources. We may then refer back to this section in our discussion of the factors which appear to have provoked or stimulated the Johannine developments. Our focus in this work, as we have already explained in the previous chapter, will be on the question of whether the distinctive aspects of John's christology can be explained in terms of legitimation, i.e. the development by the Evangelist of earlier traditions as part of an attempt to defend his and his community's beliefs. It will therefore be important to have in mind from the outset what some of the key distinctive elements are in Johannine christology, as well as some idea of how they compare with earlier traditions and documents. Further discussion of a number of the points made and texts referred to will be given in the main body of this thesis.

2.2.1 Jesus and Wisdom/Logos/Spirit

We may treat together the closely related themes of Wisdom, Word and Spirit, because, as a number of scholars note, "Spirit, Wisdom and Logos were all more or less synonymous ways of speaking of God's outreach to man."[6] The Fourth Evangelist was not the first Christian writer to present Jesus as speaking with the voice of Wisdom: compare Matthew's adaptation of the Q tradition in Matt. 11:19,25-30;23:34-39.[7] However, Matthew's portrait is not to be equated with that of John's in the way that Suggs suggests, when he writes that "it would not greatly overstate the case to say that *for Matthew* Wisdom has 'become flesh and dwelled among us' (John 1:14)."[8] As Stanton points out, these features still play only a relatively minor role in Matthew, the presentation of Jesus as speaking with the voice of Wisdom occurring in only two or three passages in the whole Gospel.[9] France, who takes a similar view to Suggs, equally fails to do justice to the differences between Matthew and John. In discussing (and rejecting) Dunn's reading of these passages, he concedes that Matthew does not use the same sort of exalted language which Paul does, but asks "how could he in a gospel?"[10] This is a very strange argument, since it is

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[6] Dunn 1989:266. This point is also made by Schimanowski 1985:75-77; Manns 1991:23; Scott 1992:94; Talbert 1993:45f. The identity of Word and Wisdom is very likely ancient (cf. Beasley-Murray 1992:1866); see also Evans 1993:84-92 on the Wisdom background of John's prologue. On this point in relation to the second century apologists cf. Grant 1986:109.

[7] On this aspect of Matthean christology cf. Dunn 1989:197-206. Also see Brown 1994:210.

[8] Suggs 1970:57.

[9] Stanton 1984:1925. See also the fuller discussion in Johnson 1974.

[10] France 1989:306 n.66.

precisely John's presentation of the earthly life of Jesus through the lens of the type of exalted Wisdom language which Paul uses, which immediately *distinguishes* John's *Gospel* from that of Matthew. We therefore cannot follow Suggs in regarding Matthew's presentation of Jesus as 'Sophia *incarnate*'.[11] At most, it might be possible to speak of Jesus as one who is *inspired* and *indwelt* by Wisdom, since inspiration seems to have been understood in this period as at times causing the inspired individual to speak in the first person with the voice of the one who inspired him or her.[12] But we do not yet have in Matthew the presentation of Jesus as one who was pre-existent, much less as one who was *aware* of having been pre-existent.[13] As Brown writes, "the most significant difference between John and the Synoptics... [is]...that the Johannine Jesus is clearly conscious of having preexisted with God before the world began (17:5) and of having come into this world from that world of previous existence in order to say and do what he heard and saw when he was with God."[14] Matthew has made a significant step in relation to Christian reflection on Christ and Wisdom, but John has taken one or more steps further, which distinguish his portrait from Matthew and all other New Testament writers,[15] in particular in the points we will now discuss.

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[11] Suggs 1970:58, emphasis added.

[12] Cf. Aune 1983:234; Hawthorne 1987; the *Odes of Solomon* provide numerous examples of this phenomenon. Cf. 8:8ff; 10:4-6; 17:6ff; 22; 28:9ff; 31:6ff; 36:3ff; 41:8-10; 42:3ff.

[13] The lack of any reference to pre-existence is even more significant when one considers that Matthew drew on the portrait of the Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch. See below, 2.2.2.

[14] Brown 1994:205. See also Dunn 1990:228.

[15] So also Dunn 1991a:321f. On Wisdom christology in Paul see now Dunn 1998:267-281,292f.

John's Wisdom or Logos christology is expressed most fully in the prologue.[16] Although the Johannine prologue is often regarded as the fullest and loftiest expression of the Johannine 'high' christology, the prologue actually has a great deal in common with earlier Christian use of Jewish Wisdom imagery, in particular with the hymnic passage found in Colossians 1:15-20, but with other passages such as Heb. 1:3 as well. Thus, as Kysar writes, "one finds the employment of this term [Logos] throughout the prologue to be a Johannine expression of a common theme of New Testament Christology."[17] The distinctiveness of the Johannine portrait is that the language is not used here simply as an expression of the lordship of the *exalted* Christ,[18] but is placed at the very start of the Gospel, affirming that the pre-existent state of the Logos is the lens through which the rest of the Gospel and the entire life of Jesus are to be viewed.[19] If Dunn is correct, ὁ λογός σὰρχ ἐγένετο in v14 may represent the first crossing of the boundary between indwelling and incarnation, the verb ἐγένετο clearly denoting an appearance on the human scene by the Logos which is of a different sort from

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[16] Hartman 1987:96f.

[17] Kysar 1978:348. So also Mealand 1978:462f; O'Brien 1982:40; Creech 1984:216; Dunn 1991a:315,321; Carson 1991:135f; Witherington 1995:56. See too Brown 1966:cxxiv-cxxv; de Jonge 1996:235.

[18] Cf. Beasley-Murray 1980; Dunn 1989:186-196. This is not to say that the exalted Christ is not in view, but simply that, in contrast with other early Christian hymns, the emphasis is much more clearly on the *pre-existence* of the one who became incarnate as Jesus, rather than on Jesus' post-exaltation status. See further our discussion in ch. 7 below.

[19] Barrett 1978:156; Dunn 1990:227f; 1991a:313; 1992a:987; Beasley-Murray 1992:1866; Loader 1992:21. Thus although the designation Logos is never used again after 1:14, it nonetheless remains true that the prologue encapsulates the (or at least a) 'chief emphasis' of Johannine christology (Dunn 1992a:988). See further Willett 1992.

the earlier appearances in Old Testament theophanies and through the inspired prophets.[20] We may also note John's use of other imagery which, while connected with the Wisdom or Logos of God in Jewish tradition, is not used elsewhere in the New Testament, such as 'tabernacling', light and glory.[21]

In all of the Gospels, Jesus is presented as one in whom God's Spirit dwelt. That John has taken a step beyond Matthew and the other Synoptics is indicated by the distinctive emphasis found in John 1:32: the Spirit did not just descend on or enter Jesus, but *remained* on him. It is this small but nonetheless significant step which, like 1:14, indicates the move by the Fourth Evangelist from a christology based on inspiration to one conceived in terms of incarnation.[22] The remainder of this study will be devoted largely to an attempt to explore the reasons why John took this step; for now we need simply note this important distinctive feature of the Fourth Gospel's christology, and its character as a development out of earlier christology.

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[20] Dunn 1989:242-244. See also McGrath 1997c:116-118 and ch.7 below for our understanding of v14 in relation to the rest of the prologue.

[21] D'Angelo 1979:174 is correct in her initial impression that "At no point does the letter to the Hebrews explicitly identify Jesus as the son with the wisdom of God". However, her final conclusion is that such an identification is nonetheless implicit in Hebrews (1979:177). Of course, the date of Hebrews is uncertain, but it nonetheless appears to the present author to represent a stage in the development of christology which, if not pre-Johannine, preserves many elements as they were at a pre-Johannine stage. There is simply no evidence that Hebrews identifies Jesus *as* Wisdom, or regards pre-existent Wisdom as having *become* the human being Jesus, to the extent that John does. Hebrews is thus best regarded as closer in its Wisdom christology to Matthew and Colossians than to John.

[22] On the distinction between inspiration and incarnation in relation to New Testament christology see Dunn 1992b:398f. On 1:32 as a parallel description of the incarnation, see Fuller 1976:61-66; Hartin 1985:45; Schoonenberg 1986:405; Watson 1987; Talbert 1993; McGrath 1996:4f; 1997c:117f. See also Brown 1979:152f; Theobald 1992:67f.

2.2.2 Jesus the Son of Man

The use of the designation ὁ υἱος του ἀνθρωπου in reference to Jesus is commonplace in the Synoptic Gospels; in John, however, it takes on new features, most notably the idea of pre-existence. The references in 3:13 and 6:62 to the Son of Man having come down from heaven are quite unlike anything else in the New Testament. Here too the Fourth Evangelist appears to be taking up an aspect of traditional Christian language, and developing it in a distinctive way.[23]

Given the parallel and roughly contemporary developments which are attested in the Similitudes of Enoch and IV Ezra,[24] it is quite likely that John is here inspired by, or making use of, a growing tendency to use the language of pre-existence in connection with the figure of the 'Son of Man'.[25] Nonetheless, John takes this pre-existence more literally than do these other works: whereas in Judaism the affirmation of the pre-existence of the Messiah, or of other figures, is little more than a way of asserting their foreordination in the plan of God, their place in God's eternal purposes, in John the Son of Man on earth is conscious of having come from heaven. As Dunn writes, "it is well nigh impossible to escape the conclusion that *the pre-existence element in the Johannine Son of Man sayings is a distinctively Johannine redaction or development of the Christian Son of Man tradition.*"[26]

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[23] Cf. Smalley 1968:297f; also Painter 1992:1870-1872.

[24] Cf. 1 Enoch 48:2f,6; IV Ezra 12:32; 13:52.

[25] Cf. Painter 1992:1872. A direct knowledge of the Similitudes of Enoch is not impossible; Dunn 1989:78 notes John 5:27 and 1 En.69:27 as a possible point of contact. This is not to suggest that 'the Son of Man' was a title, but simply that the Danielic 'human-like figure' was given a messianic interpretation in this period, as even Vermes 1973:175 and Hare 1990:11f recognize.

[26] Dunn 1989:90. See also Dunn 1990:221-23.

John's distinctiveness can be seen more clearly when we compare his work with that of Matthew, who also seems to show knowledge of the Similitudes of Enoch, inasmuch as he presents Jesus as the Son of Man in his role of judgment 'sitting on his throne of glory'.[27] Yet "such points of contact as there are between Matthew and the Similitudes focus attention on the eschatological role of the Son of Man in the final judgment, and while Matthew may possibly have been aware of the pre-existence attributed to the Son of Man in the Similitudes..., there is nothing to show that he intended a similar implication to be read into his own use of the Christian Son of Man tradition."[28] Thus, whether John was familiar with the application of pre-existence language to the Son of Man from Christian or Jewish circles, he appears to be the first person to draw the implication that the Son of Man on earth was *aware* of having been pre-existent in heaven. On this point John's distinctiveness is indisputable.

John also runs together the crucifixion and ascension/exaltation/glorification of the Son of Man, bringing the two ideas together under a single term, 'lifting up' (ὑψουν). In earlier literature, Jesus is thought of as having been crucified and as having been exalted to heaven, but the two are not combined in the way they are by John.[29] Nonetheless, the fact that there is a threefold passion prediction connected

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[27] Cp. Matt.19:28 and 25:31f with 1 Enoch 45:3; 55:4; 61:8; 62:5; 69:27. See also Dunn 1989:77f; Higgins 1964:107,117. Higgins 1964:106 also notes the connection between Matt.16:28 and 1 En.62:5-7 inasmuch as both speak of the *kingdom* of the Son of Man.

[28] Dunn 1989:89.

[29] Cf. Smalley 1968:298.

with the Son of Man in both Mark and John,[30] taken together with John's use of the traditional language 'the Son of Man must', suggests that John's usage is a development out of the earlier, Synoptic-type tradition.[31]

Before proceeding, mention may also be made here of the motif of Jesus as 'not of this world' and 'from above', which has been drawn to the attention of Johannine scholars in particular by the recent works of Wayne Meeks[32] and Jerome Neyrey.[33] While this is clearly a Johannine distinctive, projecting upon its portrait of Jesus the community's sensation of a division between 'us and them', between a faithful minority and a hostile wider world, it nonetheless reflects a type of dualism which is also present in other Jewish and Christian sources.[34] The Pauline doctrine of two ages,[35] the heavenly/earthly contrasts in Hebrews,[36] and even the Matthean logion about two roads/ways,[37] show that John is once again unique not so much in his content, as in his emphasis on and

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[30] Mark 8:31; 9:12-31; 10:33f; John 3:13-15; 8:28f; 12:32-34. Cf. Schnackenburg 1968:535; Moloney 1978:215,218; Létourneau 1992:579f.

[31] See further Schaberg 1985:217; Moloney 1989:1423; Létourneau 1992; Schnackenburg 1992:1744f.

[32] Meeks 1986.

[33] Neyrey 1988.

[34] On the very striking and significant Qumran parallels cf. Charlesworth 1972:89-103; Price 1972:18-25; Fennema 1979:59-67.

[35] Cf. Kreitzer 1993:254f,259f on the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' aspects of Pauline dualism and eschatology. See also Maile 1993.

[36] See e.g. Heb. 8:5; 9:23; 11:16; 12:22.

[37] Matt.7:14; see also *Didache* 1-6. There are also allusions to a doctrine of two ages in Matthew: cf. e.g. 12:32; 24:14. This is of course a present/future dualism rather than a 'vertical' above/below dualism, but these are two different emphases found also in Jewish literature, often side by side.

development of motifs and imagery which are not entirely absent from earlier Christian writings.[38]

2.2.3 Jesus the Prophet (like Moses)

Here too John makes use of a motif and imagery which is not uniquely his, and yet which is used by him in his own way. Dale Allison has recently undertaken a fairly comprehensive survey of the use of Moses typology in Matthew.[39] He notes, however, many examples of the influence of a Moses typology on Luke-Acts and in many other writings of the New Testament and later Christian literature.[40] Already in Paul we find the covenants established through Jesus and Moses being compared and contrasted,[41] and this theme also has a major part to play in the epistle to the Hebrews.[42] It is thus not true to regard this as a distinctively Johannine emphasis.[43] Nonetheless, in John the belief that Jesus is the 'prophet (like Moses)' is perhaps made more explicit than elsewhere in the New Testament.[44] There

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[38] On Johannine dualism see further the summary and discussion of recent scholarship in Kysar 1985:2451f; Ashton 1991:205-237.

[39] Allison 1993.

[40] Allison 1993:99f on Luke-Acts; on Jewish traditions of Mosaic typology in relation to the Messiah see 1993:85-90.

[41] See e.g. 1 Cor. 10:2; 2 Cor. 3:7-11.

[42] See e.g. Heb. 3:3-6; 7:12-14. The whole book compares the old covenant with the new. On the Moses-Christ typology in Hebrews see especially D'Angelo 1979.

[43] Cf. also Casey 1991:68, who accepts that Jesus described himself as a prophet. On the portrait of Jesus as prophet in the various New Testament documents see Schnider 1973 (he deals with the theme of prophet like Moses in the Synoptic Gospels on pp.89-101); Schelkle 1973.

[44] See e.g. John 1:21,25,45; 5:46; 6:14; 7:40,52. See further Boismard 1953:165f; Schnider 1973:191-230; Schnackenburg 1992:1738f; Thompson 1992:378; Brown 1994:210-213; Smith 1995:125f. See also Davies 1964:410, who writes that "the Fourth Gospel sets Jesus *over against* Moses more explicitly than does Matthew, who sets the two figures...in parallelism...Jesus appears not as the interpreter of the old Torah but as, in his own person, the Word, the Torah". Thus it may be true to

is also a focus on Jesus' signs, and on the acceptance or rejection of him by others, motifs which tie in with the portrait of Moses in the Jewish scriptures,[45] while (in contrast with Matthew) little attention is given to his teaching.[46]

P. Anderson has recently written, "It would not be an exaggeration to say that much of John's theology, christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology is based upon an understanding of Deuteronomy 18:18, which promises that God will continue his redemptive dialogue with humanity by means of the prophet(s) like Moses who speak all that God commands. This important connection has been overlooked by most Johannine scholars. John's subordinate *and* egalitarian christological themes are subsumed in the same schema: *John's agency christology*. They are two sides of the same coin".[47] The connection between John's portrait of Jesus as prophet (like Moses) and the emphasis on his role as God's agent[48] leads us on conveniently to the next element of Johannine christology we shall be considering.

2.2.4 Jesus God's Son and Agent

In pre-Johannine Christian documents, Jesus is frequently referred to as God's Son, and presented as his chief, ultimate and final/eschatological agent or envoy. These two motifs may

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emphasize, as many commentators do, that for John Jesus is *more than* a prophet, but this does not appear to have moved John to regard the designation 'prophet' as one that is inappropriate for Jesus.

[45] On Moses typology in John see further Ashton 1991:277f,470-476; Pryor 1992:117-124; Smith 1995:108,126. See also Boismard 1953:165-175.

[46] Although Jesus is still presented as a teacher and 'rabbi' in John. See Smith 1984:177f. The 'teaching' which the Johannine Jesus does give is almost exclusively christological.

[47] Anderson 1996:175.

[48] Cf. Meeks 1967:301f; Evans 1993:135-144.

be treated together, since they are linked in both the Synoptic tradition and in John.[49] The key idea behind agency in the ancient world, and early Judaism in particular, is that the one sent is like the one who sent him. Statements to this effect are found outside the New Testament in Philo[50] and the Rabbinic literature,[51] and also in non-Jewish sources.[52] They also occur in the New Testament, important examples from the Synoptics being Mark 9:37 and pars.; also Matt.15:24; Luke 4:43. In John, many more examples of this language are to be found, but they still bear a close resemblance to their Synoptic counterparts: Cf. John 5:23; 6:38; 12:44f; 13:20; 14:9; 15:23; see also 3:34; 7:16; 8:26,28f,42; 14:24.

Not only is the agent *sent* (a point to which we shall return below), but he or she also bears the authority of the sender and may act with the full authority of the sender. It is for this reason that Jesus can be presented as carrying out what were traditionally divine prerogatives, such as pronouncing sins forgiven (cf. Mark 2:5-10 and pars.; Luke 7:47-49 - the miracle in the former instance is given as a demonstration that God has indeed delegated his power and authority to Jesus). In John, the portrait is very similar to

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[49] As e.g. in Mark 12:6; Matt.11:27; cf. also 10:40; John 5:16-26; 6:44 and 10:36 (see also our discussions of sonship and agency in chs. 4 and 6 below). On the son as the father's agent par excellence in the ancient world cf. Harvey 1982:161. See further Witherington 1995:141; also Schnackenburg 1992:1738-1743; Beasley-Murray 1992:1861; Ashton 1994:71-89. Jesus is also presented as God's agent in Paul, on which see Hagner 1991:20-25. On agency in relation to christology in general cf. Buchanan 1986.

[50] *Dec.* 119.

[51] See for example *Ber.*5.5; *Qidd.*41b,43a; *Hag.* 10b; *Naz.* 12b; *Baba Qamma* 113b; *Sifre* on Numbers 12:9; *y. Hag.* 76d. See further Meeks 1967:301f; Harvey 1982:161f; Borgen 1986; Beasley-Murray 1992:1857.

[52] Cf. Mitchell 1992:644-661; Borgen 1996b:101f,120 n.22.

that of the Synoptics in many ways, but the things which Jesus is held to do as God's Son/agent are intensified: in addition to the forgiveness of sins,[53] which is also mentioned in the Synoptics,[54] in John Jesus is said to work on the Sabbath as God does, to judge and to give life to the dead, even eternal life. Although Jesus raises the dead in the Synoptics,[55] and is expected as the eschatological judge, here these points are made much more strongly and emphatically, and the eschatological aspects are moved forward into the life of the earthly Jesus, so that already in the present his ministry brings about judgment and the reception of the gift of eternal life.[56] To quote Anderson again, "While the agency schema is central to John's christology, the evangelist did not invent it."[57] Yet as Harvey writes, "though it is recognized that the origins of this emphasis...may well lie further back in the tradition represented by the Synoptics, the presentation of the Son as the Father's agent *par excellence* (which was empirically

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[53] John 20:23. See also 5:14.

[54] Mark 2:5-9 and pars.; Luke 7:48.

[55] Mark 5:35-43; cp. John 11:11, where the euphemism 'sleep' (albeit a different, synonymous Greek word) is also used for death, in reference to someone Jesus is about to raise from the dead.

[56] For further discussion of Jesus as God's agent in John, see Meeks 1967:301-305; 1976:54-60; Bühner 1977:59-72; Borgen 1986; Buchanan 1986:181f; Harvey 1987; Thompson 1992:377-379; Létourneau 1993:233-255. The difference in emphasis in the realm of eschatology is closely tied to the distinctives of Johannine christology, but unfortunately space will not permit a discussion of this here.

[57] Anderson 1996:176. Anderson goes further, claiming a degree of continuity with the self-understanding of the historical Jesus. See also Sanders 1985:240. Few today would share the optimism of Robinson 1984c; see the more cautious statement of Dunn 1989:25f. The segment of Anderson's assertion which we have quoted appears far more certain. See also Painter 1991:307; Witherington 1995:141.

the case in ancient Middle Eastern commerce) is likely to be the product of the evangelist's innovative mind."[58]

One key feature in connection with this motif, which we have already noted briefly but need to discuss further, is the idea of God *sending* his Son, a motif found in both the Synoptics and John,[59] as well as in other New Testament documents.[60] In the literature we have already considered, Jesus is portrayed as God's agent, who has received a prophetic-type commissioning and now functions as God's agent.[61] However, it may be that in John, where Jesus is also thought of as the incarnation of one who previously pre-existed with God, the context may demand that we think of the Son having been sent *from heaven*.[62] Yet there is at least some evidence to suggest that John may have distinguished between 'Son' as a designation of Jesus, the Logos incarnate, and other designations appropriate to refer to the pre-existent state of the Logos.[63] Thus, while it seems probable that John has intensified the earlier portraits of Christ as God's agent, it is not clear how

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[58] Harvey 1987:241. Kanagaraj 1995:216-220 is right to draw attention to the limitations of agency as a *total* explanation of Johannine christology. Nonetheless, many of the points which he makes apply to earthly agents, but not to heavenly agents/personified divine attributes (cf. Fennema 1979:294-296). See further also Harvey 1982:162f.

[59] Cf. Schnackenburg 1992:1738; also Pryor 1992:119f.

[60] Cf. Bultmann 1955:2.7 on this and other terminology which Paul and John share, not because of direct influence on one another, but as part of their common Christian heritage. Also cf. Schnackenburg 1984:104-106; Weder 1990:164; Hagner 1991:21; Kanagaraj 1995:209-223; de Jonge 1996:235.

[61] Cf. Bühner 1977:374-433; Thompson 1992:378.

[62] In contrast to the understanding of sending in the Synoptics - see Brown 1994:205. Schnackenburg 1984:104-108 interprets the Pauline sending motif in terms of pre-existence, but in fact there is nothing in Paul (and perhaps not in John either) which explicitly links the designation 'Son of God' with pre-existence.

[63] See especially Cadman 1969:11-13; also Dunn 1991b:228f.

the sending of the man Jesus relates to the sending of the Logos from heaven. The relationship between the various aspects of John's distinctive christology is a problematic and difficult subject, which we will return to towards the end of the thesis.[64] Nonetheless, for now we may note that the sending of the Son is a far more central element in the Johannine portrait of Christ than it is in any of the other New Testament documents that we have, and Loader rightly regards it as part of the 'central structure' of the christology of the Fourth Gospel.[65]

2.2.5 Jesus as the Son who Reveals the Father

The similarity between the so-called 'bolt from the Johannine blue' in the Synoptics (Matt.11:27; Lk.10:22) and John's presentation of Jesus is well known. Yet as Loader emphasizes, "This is in fact more than 'a bolt from the Johannine blue'. It is a foreshadowing of the central structure of Johannine christology and may well reflect its origin."[66] Thus the language of sonship and even of revelation, while central in John, is not entirely absent from earlier Christian writings.[67] And while there is much more focus on the 'I' of Jesus in John,[68] this is presumably because he functions in a much fuller way as God's agent and representative. John's Gospel, as

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[64] See below ch.15, esp. 15.3.

[65] Loader 1984:189-191; 1992:30-32.

[66] Loader 1984:204. See also Painter 1991:44; Sabbe 1991:407; Denaux 1992:187f; Schnackenburg 1992:1740f.

[67] Moloney 1989:1422.

[68] Cf. Dunn 1991b:314 n.58.

Barrett has emphasized, is focused on the Father, and on Jesus because he makes the Father known; it is theocentric as much as christocentric.[69] Here, as in the other aspects of Johannine christology we have considered, a feature of earlier christology appears in the Fourth Gospel in a much more fully developed form, and plays a far more central in the overall portrait of Christ than it did in earlier writings.[70]

2.2.6 Jesus the Bearer of the Divine Name

The bearing of the divine name by Jesus is connected with a number of the motifs we have already surveyed: divine agency, the exaltation of the Son of Man, and perhaps even with Moses typology.[71] There is clear evidence in Phil. 2:9f that the belief that Jesus bore the divine name is much earlier than John.[72] What is distinctive in John among the New Testament literature is the conviction that Jesus bore that name not as a result of his exaltation (which simply reveals what was already the case, namely that Jesus is 'I am'),[73] but even during his earthly life.

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[69] Barrett 1982b; likewise Moloney 1989:1420; Loader 1992:171; see also Dunn 1991b:314 n.56, for a comparison of the frequency of the designation 'Father' for God in the Synoptics and John. This topic was also addressed by Marianne Meye Thompson in her paper "The Neglected Factor in Johannine Theology" given at the 1997 SNTS conference in Birmingham, England.

[70] Cf. Loader 1984:190; 1992:32f; Painter 1991:44; Sabbe 1991:407; Denaux 1992:187f. On the earlier history of, and other issues relating to, the Q logion Matt.11:27/Lk.10:22, see also Légasse 1976.

[71] There are numerous references in the Samaritan literature to Moses having been vested with the divine name. These can be conveniently found in Fossum 1985:87-94. See also Meeks 1968:359-361.

[72] It is generally accepted that the 'name above every name' is the name of God. Cf. e.g. Howard 1978:381-386; Wright 1991a:93f; Dunn 1991b:189f; Hagner 1991:25f. Note also Heb. 1:4,8, where, however, the name which is mind may be 'Son' rather than 'Lord'.

[73] See our discussion of 8:28 below, ch. 5.

Wright is correct to understand the author of the hymn preserved in Phil. 2:6-11 to be applying to Christ an acclamation which was, in Isa. 45:23, attributed to God. However, he is too quick to assume that the obvious implication for a first century Jewish reader would be that Christ was not only pre-existent, but eternally divine.[74] As the detailed study by Hurtado has shown, first century Jewish monotheism had room for exalted figures who functioned as divine envoys or agents,[75] and these figures could even bear the divine name.[76] For the author of the Philippians hymn, as also presumably for Paul, understanding Christ's exalted status in such terms was not problematic.[77] The safeguarding affirmation, 'to the glory of God the Father', is felt to be more than sufficient to make clear and unambiguous that Jesus' exalted lordship is not to be understood as detracting in any way from monotheism or from the glory due only to God himself.[78] This did become controversial

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[74] Wright 1991a:93f. Cf. Dunn 1991b:190, who stresses that Paul uses this language as much to *distinguish* between Jesus and God as to identify them. See also Dunn 1993:205.

[75] Hurtado 1988, *passim*. See also Philip S. Alexander's conclusion that "There can now be no question that early Judaism did know of powerful semi-divine mediator figures, so the high Christology of some of the early Christian writings can actually be given a *Jewish* context" (1992:19f). On the meaning of 'high' christology see Brown 1994a:4f.

[76] Cf. The angel Yaoel in *Apoc. Abr.* 10:3-17. In later literature cf. the Samaritan work Memar Marqah 1.1,3,9,12; 2.12; 4.7; 5.4; 6.6; 3 Enoch 12:5, and also *Gen. Rab.* 43.3. The origin of this tradition is almost certainly Exod. 23:21.

[77] Cf. Dunn 1991b:191,205f. Dunn points out that, if Paul's christology had been found objectionable by his contemporaries, we would certainly expect to find some trace of this in his letters.

[78] This is not to say that the author was even consciously aware that his christological affirmation could be in any way problematic. Nevertheless, the fact that this final statement was added may suggest that, if only at a subconscious level, the author wanted to make sure no misinterpretation of his striking language would ensue, perhaps in particular by Gentile readers. See also Kreitzer 1987:160f; Steenburg 1990:100f.

at a later stage,[79] and in John we see controversy developing in precisely this area and in relation to precisely these concepts. But in this early period, such beliefs were not felt to be a threat to monotheism[80] or any other aspect of Jewish tradition and belief, and were regarded by Christians as an appropriate language to use in response to the unique eschatological action of God in and through Christ for the salvation of his people Israel and of all mankind. John's portrait of Jesus as one who has been made to bear the divine name is best regarded as a development of earlier traditions of this sort.[81]

2.2.7 Jesus as God

The question whether Christians prior to John applied the designation 'God' (θεός) to Jesus is difficult to answer. Hebrews clearly does so (1:8),[82] but the date of this work is uncertain. Titus and 2 Peter are generally regarded as pseudepigrapic works of a relatively late date, but quite apart from this point the correct translation of 2 Peter 1:1 and Titus 2:13 is uncertain.[83] Similar ambiguity plagues almost all occurrences, but most scholars conclude that instances such as

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[79] Cf. *b.* Sanh. 63a.

[80] Cf. Apoc.Abr.19:1-5, which makes clear that the author was a monotheist. That the Samaritan version of this idea was understood to be monotheistic is clear from passages like Memar Marqah 4.7. For John as a first century Jewish monotheist see ch. 3 below.

[81] For further evidence of John's close contact with earlier traditions here, see our discussion below, 5.2.2.

[82] This is the only non-Johannine occurrence which Brown regards as a clear and unambiguous use of θεὸς as a designation for Jesus (1994a:185-187). So also Cullmann 1959:310.

[83] Although on the latter cf. Dunn 1993:206.

2 Thess. 1:12 and Col. 2:2 do not intend to refer to Jesus as 'God'.[84] That the Synoptics do not do so is clear, and if anything they distinguish clearly between Jesus and God.[85] Romans 9:5 is probably the only passage in the Pauline corpus for which a strong case can be made on grammatical grounds that Jesus is referred to as 'God'.[86] Nevertheless even here there is ambiguity. At least some early copyists, when adding punctuation to this text, understood it *not* to be calling Christ God. In addition, many scholars feel that Paul, who elsewhere distinguishes between God and Christ, would not here break from his usual pattern.[87]

Yet even if it is allowed that Paul, like Hebrews and John later on, did call Jesus 'God', this does not immediately answer the question of what he might have meant by it.[88] Even in the Jewish Christianity of later times, the use of the designation 'God' in reference to Jesus was accepted, provided this was understood in a broader sense current in Judaism which

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[84] Guthrie 1981:340; Harris 1992:263-266.

[85] Brown 1994a:174f. See also Cullmann 1959:308.

[86] Metzger 1973. See also Cullmann 1959:312f; Dunn 1991b:203; Harris 1992:154.

[87] On this passage see further Dunn 1988:528f; 1991b:203f; 1998:255-257. On all of these passages see also Harvey 1982:157,176-178.

[88] Dunn 1989:45; 1992a:984. On the significance of the application of the designation 'God' to Christ in Hebrews 1-2, see Hurst 1987; Harris 1992:200-202. D'Angelo's attempt (1979:165f,186) to read Hebrews 3 as attributing to the Son the role of creator seems unlikely to be correct (cf. the preferable exegesis of Guthrie 1983:100; Bruce 1990:92f), and also fails to acknowledge the wider usage of the designation θεός in this period (cf. Hurst 1987; Harris 1992:200-202). She seems to be reading Hebrews' use of Wisdom/Logos imagery and ideas in light of John's use, but it is by no means clear that Hebrews is later than John or represents a viewpoint similar to or as developed as John's (*contra* D'Angelo 1979:11). See also Harvey 1982:166,172; 1987:249f and Thompson 1992:377, who suggest that the origins of the application of θεός to Jesus may perhaps be tied to the idea of Jesus as God's supreme agent or representative.

was not felt to conflict with monotheism.[89] We also have evidence in Jewish sources for the belief that Moses was exalted to the position of 'God and king',[90] and that Adam, as the image of God, was regarded as functioning as God's agent and thus 'as God' over the earth.[91] It may thus be in this broader sense that Paul applies the term to Christ, if he does so at all. This would be consonant with his emphasis on Christ as the Last Adam, as well as with the contrast made between the glory of the covenant which came through Moses and that which came through Christ (as e.g. in 2 Cor.3:7-18).[92] In the only instance in which John hints that the application of the designation 'God' to Christ may have been an issue (10:33-35), an appeal is made to this broader use of the term 'God'.[93] It is thus not clear whether the use of 'God' in reference to Christ is a Johannine innovation, but if not, it is unlikely that Paul or any other writer before John's time applies the designation to Christ in anything more than this broader sense.

The question of whether John's usage marks a development beyond an earlier usage is also confronted with a further

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[89] Cf. e.g. Ps.-Clem. *Recognitions* 2.42. See also McGrath 1996:6.

[90] Meeks 1968 is the main study of this area. See further Chilton 1992:101, and also Philo, *Sac.*9; *Prob.*43; *Som.*2.189; *Mos.*1.158; *Qu.Ex.*2.29.

[91] Cf. Philo *Opif.* 83f,148; Sir.49:16; 2 Enoch 31:3; 58:3f; *Apoc. Mos.* 20-21; *Life of Adam and Eve* 12-13. The rabbinic tradition preserved in *Gen. Rab.* 8 shows knowledge of a similar tradition, although it seeks to counter it by presenting God as demonstrating man's mortality and thus preventing the angels from worshipping him. See also *Pirke de R. El.* ch.11; *Rosh-ha-Shanah* 31a.

[92] See also Steenburg 1990 for the suggestion that the origin of the worship of Christ has its origins in Adam christology and the tradition that Adam was worshipped as the image of God.

[93] See our discussion below, ch. 6. In other places it is claiming the *status* of God, and not the *title*, that is at issue. See also Thompson 1992:377; de Jonge 1996:236.

difficulty, namely the textual variants in John 1:18.[94] That the risen Christ is called 'God' in 20:28 seems certain,[95] and that Jesus is the incarnation of the Logos who is God is also clear, this latter point being a definite development beyond earlier tradition. What use and developments John may have made will have to await our discussion below. For the present we may simply note that 'the Jews' in John are adamantly opposed to claims for Jesus which seem to attribute him an equal *status* to God, but nowhere is the issue of *calling* Jesus 'God' explicitly raised, although it may be implied.[96]

2.3 Conclusion

As D. M. Smith writes, "There is no major aspect of this Johannine presentation of Jesus which is absolutely unique or foreign to other strains of early Christianity, even to the synoptic gospels. What is uniquely Johannine is the way these aspects of, or perspectives on, Jesus are made to coalesce into a single narrative so that each is always present in almost every part of the narrative."[97] We shall have the opportunity to consider not only the ways that John has developed individual motifs in forming his distinctive christology, but also the

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[94] On this passage, and particularly the text critical discussion, see Mastin 1975:37-41; Davies 1992:123f; Harris 1992:73-92; Ehrman 1993:78-82.

[95] Brown 1994:188 not only classes this as one of three passages where Christ is clearly called 'God', but also states that "This is the clearest example in the NT of the use of "God" for Jesus". Cf. also Harris 1992:106-129. In 1:18 the risen and exalted Christ is also probably in view - see our discussion in McGrath 1997c:106-108 and below, 7.2.

[96] Cf. our further discussion of John 10:22-39 in ch. 6 below.

[97] Smith 1984:187. See also Mealand 1978:466; Dunn 1991a:321f; Schnackenburg 1992:1749f.

distinctive way he has related these various elements to one another, in the course of our discussion below. But for now, it is sufficient that we have shown through our rather brief survey that the Fourth Evangelist's key christological ideas are not entirely different from the motifs and imagery of other early Christian writers, and yet also that John has developed and used these elements of his Christian heritage in a distinctive way. As Dunn puts it, "if we are to do justice to the Johannine distinctives, we have to see them as a development of the Jesus-tradition designed to express the truth of Jesus as understood within the Johannine circle."[98] It is to the subject of *why* John developed the tradition in precisely the way that he did that we will now turn. Our aim, as already stated, will be to attempt to trace the connections between issues in the conflict on the one hand, and developments in the christology on the other, to determine whether John's distinctive developments are part of his attempt to legitimate his community's beliefs about Jesus in response to objections which had been raised.

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[98] Dunn 1991a:321. See also Dunn 1992a:987.

PART 2

JESUS & GOD

CHAPTER 3

"...THOSE WHO SAY 'THERE ARE TWO POWERS IN JOHN'..."

In this second part of the thesis, we shall be focusing our attention on four key passages in the Gospel of John which concern the relationship between Jesus and God: the prologue and chs. 5, 8 and 10. However, before proceeding to our treatment of this theme, we need to consider one particular issue relating to the Jewish background that is often posited for these Johannine controversy passages. There has been a tendency in recent scholarship to read the Fourth Gospel in light of the evidence in Rabbinic literature concerning heretics who claimed that 'there are two powers in heaven'.[1] This has been a helpful contribution, inasmuch as it has highlighted the fact that Johannine Christianity should be regarded as part of a much wider stream of *Jewish* thought which later orthodoxy excluded from its definition of Judaism. Alan Segal's study of this topic has shown that the ideas which the later rabbis polemicized against and rejected were probably widespread in first century Judaism. However, he moves too quickly from the justified conclusion that the ideas were widespread in the New Testament period, to the much more

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[1] So e.g. Segal 1977:262; Meeks 1990:312; Dunn 1991b:224,229; 1998:253; Ashton 1991:144-146; Gaston 1996:122. See also Hurtado 1988:1f, who relates this issue even to pre-Johannine Christianity; Sanders 1993:65f, who is more cautious than many, but still accepts much of Segal's case; Kanagaraj 1995:118f; de Jonge 1996:236 n.9.

hypothetical conclusion that the ideas were *already considered heretical* in the first century.[2]

Segal refers to a number of dialogues and discussions in the Rabbinic literature which are attributed to tannaitic rabbis, as evidence of the views held during this period. However, there is apparently *no passage whatsoever* in the Mishnah which Segal could cite as mentioning the 'two powers' heresy. This is particularly striking in view of the fact that the Talmudim contain references to 'two powers' in places where the Mishnaic passage being commented on does not.[3] Similarly the Tosefta, composed c.220-300 C.E., while it makes a number of references to Christians as *minim* ('heretics'), contains no explicit mention of 'two powers'.[4] All of the other sources which are cited by Segal are generally accepted to be later than the Mishnah and Tosefta, in some cases much, much later.[5]

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[2] Segal also assumes that there was an orthodoxy in Judaism to make such a distinction (Segal 1987:17). We have already discussed the problems which such a view encounters (above pp. 4-10).

[3] Cf. Segal 1977:98f for a clear example of this. Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 refers to some who say 'there are many ruling powers in heaven', but the context and the belief system referred to sounds like polytheism, or perhaps Gnosticism. The reference is at any rate not to 'two powers in heaven'.

[4] Cf. Moore 1927:365 n.2, who notes that most debates with Christians about the unity of God are associated with rabbis from the 3rd century.

[5] Cf. Stemberger 1996 on the dating of specific sources. We may mention here the sources cited by Segal: The Mekhiltas of R. Simeon ben Yohai and of R. Ishmael are probably to be dated to the fourth and third centuries respectively in their present, redacted forms (although Wacholder 1968 argues for a post-Talmudic date). The Talmudim are probably to be dated to roughly the 5th (Yerushalmi) and 6th (Bavli) centuries, although they too underwent significant subsequent redaction(s). Gen. Rab. is not to be dated earlier than 400 C.E., and Sifre Deuteronomy is probably late 3rd century. Pesiq. R. is dated to the 6th or 7th century. The Tanchuma probably reached its present form around 400 C.E. at the latest, but continued to undergo further redaction after this. Deut. Rab. may be as early as c.450 C.E. or as late as 800 C.E. in its final form. Eccles. Rab. is 6th-8th century. Sifre Zu.ta is problematic to use, as our only knowledge of it is from Medieval quotations (cf. Moore 1927:144f). Of course, critical study of many of these texts is still in its infancy, and many of these dates may prove to be incorrect: the point is that the Mishnah (c. 200 C.E.) does not refer to 'two powers', and all of the texts which Segal cites as referring to 'two powers' are generally agreed to be later than

Of course, we are not attempting to deny that traditions found in later texts may nonetheless be much older than the written document in which they are found. However, complete silence on a particular *controversy* in earlier documents is usually a reliable indicator that the topic in question was not known or was not of particular importance in the earlier period. Thus, while the fact that a particular *exegetical tradition,* for example, is not mentioned earlier does not necessarily indicate that it is not in fact earlier, the fact that a particular *controversy* or *conflict* is not mentioned at all probably suggests that the controversy had not yet arisen, since heresy necessitates a response.[6] It therefore seems reasonable to expect controversies to leave some form of literary evidence of their existence. And as there is no clear trace of the problem of 'two powers heresy' in the Mishnah or Tosefta, whereas there is in the Rabbinic writings which date from later in the third century and thereafter, it seems most likely that this controversy arose in the third century, or perhaps the very late second century at the earliest. At the very least, it is, in view of the evidence, problematic to *assume* that this controversy provides the context of conflict in which the Gospel of John, and/or the material contained therein, was formed.

We may thus reiterate what a number of scholars have recently emphasized: a century was just as long in the ancient world as it is today, and for this reason it is simply

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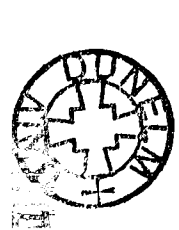
this. We should thus refrain from *assuming* that 'two powers' was an issue in the second century, much less the first.

[6] Cf. Berger and Luckmann 1967:123-134.



unjustified to assume that what was controversial in the third and subsequent centuries was controversial in the first century. Thus, in much the same way that one would be cautious of reading the Synoptics in light of John, much less in light of the council of Nicaea, so one must be cautious of reading first century sources in light of the views held by the rabbis of third and subsequent centuries. It is thus to be stressed that there is *no evidence* from Rabbinic sources[7] that views such as those held by Philo were considered heretical or even objectionable in the first century - if anything, they are so widely attested as to appear to have been *normative* rather than 'heretical' in early Judaism.[8] Similarly, it should be stressed again that proving that views which were later deemed heretical *existed* in the first century is not to demonstrate that they were *already deemed heretical* then.[9]

Perhaps the closest that we can come to the period of the conflict reflected in John is in a discussion attributed to R. Akiba. In a Talmudic passage which purports to recount a debate between Akiba and R. Yosi the Galilean (*b.* Hag. 14a), Akiba interprets the plural thrones in Dan. 7:9 as 'one for God and

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[7] Of course, *b.* Hag 15a dates the origins of 'two powers' to the apostasy of Aher in the first half of the second century, but as Segal admits, this is a late addition to the Babylonian Talmud (Segal 1977:60). See further Ginzberg 1903:138; Bowker 1969:149; Halperin 1980:75f; Gruenwald 1988:229f, 242, and also my forthcoming article, co-authored with Jerry Truex, "The Two Powers Heresy: Towards a Revised Tradition History". Even if this tradition were reliable (which seems unlikely, as there are older accounts of Aher's apostasy which do not mention two powers), this would still give us a date in the second century, not the first.

[8] Cf. especially Hurtado 1988, *passim,* on the many intermediary figures and personified divine attributes found in Jewish literature in this period; also Hengel 1995:367f; Lang 1997:107f.

[9] Cf. Segal 1977:27f,119f,173,192,260; Alexander 1983; Gruenwald 1988:230 for cautionary remarks concerning dating and methodology. See too Dunn 1982:322, and in relation to another set of later writings see Ashton 1991:295, whose remarks are equally applicable in the present context.

one for David (i.e. for the Messiah)'. This interpretation is rejected by R. Yosi as 'profaning the Shekinah'.[10] The Synoptic Gospels appear to confirm that the interpretation of Dan. 7:9 in terms of the Messiah was already controversial prior to John's time, since, in their accounts of the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, they portray the Jewish leaders as finding Jesus' affirmation concerning the 'Son of Man' objectionable and 'blasphemy'.[11] It is possible that the idea of a human being *sitting* enthroned in heaven was felt to be dangerous by some even at a fairly early stage.[12] However, there is no clear evidence that ideas such as *logos* were felt to be unacceptable.[13] Their unacceptability in later times may have

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[10] Dunn 1991b:224 also notes that this is probably the earliest stratum of the material relating to the controversy.

[11] Cf. Evans 1995:210f. That 'blasphemy' is not a category which first century Jews associated exclusively with threats to monotheism is clear from Philo (*De Spec. Leg.* I,53) and Josephus (*Ant.* IV,207), who use the term in reference to insulting even the 'so-called gods' of the Gentiles. See further Bock 1994:184f; Evans 1995:409-411; also Harvey 1982:170f.

[12] On a human figure sitting in heaven as a recurring focus of debate see Bock 1994:189; Gruenwald 1988:238; see also below (esp. chs.7-8). It may in fact very well be the case that even sitting enthroned in heaven was not problematic in and of itself in this period (cf. the claims made in Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge* 68-86; 4Q427, 4Q491), but only when it was claimed of an apparently failed Messiah, both Jesus and Bar Kochba having been put to death by the Romans for their Messianic claims. This is perhaps supported by Acts 7:56f (cf. 6:11), where even the vision of the Son of Man *standing* (not sitting!) at God's side provokes Stephen's accusers to stone him. It would then be the attribution of an exalted status to a *particular type of figure*, rather than the exalted status *per se*, that is problematic. Given the difficulty scholars have had in determining exactly what was 'blasphemous' about the claims made by Jesus in the Synoptics (cf. Sanders 1990:60-67), we can do little more in this context than note three possibilities: (1) the claim to sit in heaven may have been blasphemous *per se;* (2) the claim may have been blasphemous when made for a failed Messiah; (3) the claim may have been blasphemous when claimed for oneself, but not when granted by God. There does not appear to be sufficient evidence to come down decisively in favour of one of these options.

[13] Even in later times many of the ideas which were supposedly 'heretical' are accepted without controversy by Jews. Cf. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 56, 60, where one of his interlocutors agrees from the outset that there is a 'second god', and Trypho is soon convinced as well. See also *b.* Sanh. 38b, which purports to recount a dialogue between R. Idi and a heretic - in the dialogue it is the rabbi and not the heretic who asserts the existence of Metatron. It was apparently not belief in a 'second power' per se that was controversial even in

resulted from the fact that Christians made use of such ideas to support their position. We need to distinguish between ideas which were objectionable because they gave too much honour to a mere human being, and ideas which were objectionable because they were felt to actually involve a rejection of, or departure from, monotheism. There is no evidence that R. Akiba was felt to have departed from monotheism, however much his thinking about the Messiah (whom he identified with Bar Kochba, which may have been part of the problem!) was felt to 'profane the Shekinah'.[14]

Other evidence suggests that the controversy within Rabbinic Judaism about Logos and divine mediators in general may have been part of a more widespread philosophical discussion which arose in the third century not only for Jews, but for Christians as well. The issue which arose in this later period was where the line should be drawn which distinguishes

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later times, but a particular type of belief about that second power. See further McGrath and Truex (cited above n.7). Cf. too Sanders 1993:93f, who is unusual in recognizing that much of what has traditionally been felt to have been blasphemous in John was in fact not so when considered in the context of the Judaism of the time. However, he does insufficient justice to the fact that messiahship would have been controversial in this period, not perhaps for theological reasons, but for its potential to create nationalistic fervour and to thereby create tension with the Roman authorities. Also, in the nationalism of the period between 70 and 135 C.E. the claim that a man who had threatened the Temple and been crucified by the Romans was the Messiah may have been particularly repugnant.

[14] Cf. Evans 1995:208. Segal assumes (1977:49) that to assert in relation to an angelic figure what Akiba asserts concerning the Messiah would be even more offensive - but this assumes that this is evidence of a first century debate concerning 'two powers' rather than demonstrating it. It makes equal sense as a reaction to a statement which is felt to give honour to the Messiah which no human being is worthy of. It also appears to be the case that things could be said about ancient biblical characters which many would be unwilling to say about a living, present-day figure. There is thus a 'psychological' aspect to this question which requires further study. It should also be mentioned that the attribution to Akiba of the view that Bar Kochba was the Messiah occurs only in significantly later writings. However, this is probably due to the situation immediately after the failed revolt, when it would have been advantageous for a number of reasons to not record facts of this sort. That Akiba's view was suppressed in earlier literature seems more likely than that later writers attributed this mistaken view to Akiba for no apparent reason.

the Creator from creation. In a recent paper, Frances Young has pointed out that there was a common cosmology accepted by nearly all, whether pagans, Jews or Christians, right through until at least the second century. The clearest evidence is perhaps the statement made by Maximus of Tyre in the second century C.E., "In spite of all this dissension (on other matters) one finds in the whole world a unanimous opinion and doctrine that there is one God, the king and father of everything, and many gods, God's co-regents. So says the Greek, so the barbarian."[15] There was apparently widespread agreement that there was what might be termed a 'hierarchy of being', with God at the top, his logos or powers next, then various divine or angelic beings, then humans, and so on.[16] Philo could therefore speak of the Logos as "neither being uncreated as God, nor yet created as you, but being in the midst between these two extremities"[17] and be understood, because it had not yet become necessary to draw a clear and unambiguous line separating creature and Creator.[18]

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[15] *Diss.* 11.5 (quoted Nilsson 1963:106).

[16] Cf. Young 1997; Hurtado 1993:365-367; also Wilson 1958:36,41,46,184; Grant 1986:91,157f; Dunn 1998:33-35; Lang 1997:107f.

[17] Philo, *Quis Rer.*, 206.

[18] See further Louth 1981:75-77. On the lack of any 'gap' between God and creation in Philo see Downing 1990. The Logos was the dividing line, so to speak, and thus 'overlapped' with both God and creation. This ambiguity ('neither created nor uncreated') was essential to this cosmology. The boundary between God and creation was thus a river rather than a wall, inasmuch as the edges were not clearly defined while the existence of a distinction was nonetheless felt to be clear. Thus rather than speaking of Revelation placing Jesus "on the divine side of the line which monotheism must draw between God and creatures" (Bauckham 1981:335), it is better to say that the close association of Jesus with the activity and worship of God in early Christianity was influential in determining, when such a line was eventually drawn, which side of the line Jesus would be placed on. The 'line' seems to have drawn by Christians in the period leading up to the Arian controversy, when the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* developed (cf. Louth 1981:75f; May 1994; Young 1997), and the Arian controversy was a

For most first century Jews, the distinguishing factor between the one true God and other 'gods' and heavenly beings was apparently *worship*. Jews had a similar cosmology to other peoples and religions in their day, but offered cultic worship only to the high God, to the one God who was the source of all others and above all others.[19] Other figures who were not worshipped, whether angelic messengers or personified divine attributes, could share in the sovereignty of God and perform divine acts as extensions of the sovereignty and activity of the one God.[20] This is significant for our study, as the focus in John (as we shall see below) is not the worship of Jesus,[21] but Jesus' participation in the activity usually reserved for the one God. Since other figures clearly could be regarded as legitimately carrying out such functions in what we know of first-century Judaism from the surviving literature, it may be necessary to rethink what exactly was at issue in John.

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debate precisely about which side of the line the Son should be placed. Unfortunately space prevents further discussion of this topic here.

[19] Hurtado 1993:360-365. See also Bauckham 1981:322,324; Hayman 1991:15; Barclay 1996:429-432. By cultic worship we have in mind the sacrificial worship of the temple; see further our discussion above, pp.26-28. For later Christians, it was still frequently sacrificial worship that was the make or break issue of their identity and of the distinctiveness of their worship, even though they themselves did not practice sacrificial worship of their own God: cf. e.g. *Mart. Pol.*, 8.2; *Acta S. Iustini*, 5; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.5; see also the *libelli* which have survived from the persecution of Decius.

[20] Hurtado 1993:360. See also Rowland 1985:38. Bockmuehl 1994:159 sums the matter up well when he writes: "The shape of first-century Jewish monotheism...was in no way monistic; it should instead be seen as concerned with divine 'monarchy' (the sole *rule* of God) and 'monolatry' (the sole *worship* of God)."

[21] The 'worship' of Jesus is only mentioned in John 9:38, where it is mentioned in passing and provokes no controversy. The meaning is presumably the broader one of prostrating oneself before someone else, which is used of Jesus frequently (and without provoking controversy) in Matthew (see above 1.1.2). It was apparently *cultic* worship that distinguished the one true God from all others.

Without going into too much detail at this point, our research suggests that the conflict with 'the Jews' over John's christology was not about Jesus performing divine functions *per se*. If Jesus was God's appointed, subordinate, obedient agent, then he could clearly do such things legitimately. The problem is that 'the Jews' do not recognize Jesus as God's agent. In their view, he is an upstart, one of a number of messianic pretenders and glory-seekers to appear on the scene during this period of Jewish history. If Jesus is the Messiah, then his actions are legitimate, because he is God's agent: this helps explain why John continues to summarize the key focus of his christology in terms of belief that Jesus is the Messiah or Christ,[22] even when he is discussing issues relating to Jesus' exercise of divine prerogatives and functions. John's aim is to demonstrate that the behaviour and characteristics of Jesus are those of an obedient son and agent. Jesus does not seek his own glory, but that of the one who sent him. John is seeking to

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[22] Cf. Dodd 1953:228f; Robinson 1959:122f; Pryor 1992:133-135. That John has completely reinterpreted 'Christ' so that for him it carries little of its original Jewish connotations and instead signifies the developed Johannine christology is argued by many (e.g. Moloney 1977, *passim*; Segal 1986:156; Dunn 1991a:303-305; Ashton 1991:245; Loader 1992:213). However, John's choice of 'Messiah/Christ' to sum up his christology at key points (most notably 20:31) must be done justice to. See also the discussions in Painter 1991:7-25; Smith 1995:85-96. De Boer 1996:66f rightly emphasizes that the *messiahship* of Jesus was the issue that led to the expulsion of the Johannine Christians, although he continues to regard the issue which led to death threats as monotheism and the perception that the Johannine Christians worshipped 'two gods'.

If Jewish tradition is even remotely accurate, the Jamnian rabbis were allowed to meet there precisely because R. Yohanan was opposed to the Jewish revolt and 'a friend of Caesar' (cf. *b.* Git. 56ab; 'Abot R. Nat. A ch.4; see also Manns 1988:9-13). Josephus' success in the post-war period is described similarly (cf. e.g *War*, 3.400-404). It thus seems that in the post-70 period the rabbis may have been particularly cautious of any movements centred on messianic figures (cf. John 11:48). On the other hand, there is some evidence for an increase in Messianic fervour in the post-70 period (cf. Klausner 1956:396-398), in which context the belief that someone who was remembered for having threatened the Temple and having been executed by the Romans may have been understandably unpopular. It is true that John seeks to reinterpret messiahship, but so do the Synoptics (see e.g. ch.13 below), and many aspects of John's distinctive portrait were in our

respond to Jewish objections by highlighting the aspects of Jesus' person and work which make clear that he is God's agent and sent one. The issue is not 'equality with God' *per se*, but whether Jesus *makes himself* equal to God.[23] God could appoint agents, who would represent him and bear his full authority (examples include Moses, the judges and various principal angelic figures). It was only when someone who had not been appointed by God tried to put himself on a par with God (like Adam, Pharaoh or the king of Babylon in the Jewish scriptures) that equality with God became problematic and even blasphemous; and it was into this latter category that 'the Jews' placed Jesus.[24] This will hopefully become clearer as we progress through our study. For the moment, it is sufficient to state that, in our view, the Johannine conflict with 'the Jews' did not concern a supposed abandonment of Jewish monotheism on the part of the Johannine Christians:[25] the Fourth Gospel never mentions the oneness of God in polemical contexts, and affirms it on one or two occasions in passing. Rather, the issue is whether Jesus is an agent carrying out God's will and purposes, or a blasphemer who is seeking glory and power for himself in a

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view developed as part of the Evangelist's attempt to defend, among other things, his belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

[23] See Brown 1979:47 n.80; Meeks 1990:310; Ashton 1994:72; and below 4.2.3.

[24] Cf. Beasley-Murray 1987:75. In a sense, the debate is about which of two kinds of 'equality' applies in the case of Jesus: the functional equivalence of a subordinate, obedient agent, and the self-appointed equality of hubris and rebelliousness.

[25] *Contra* Martyn 1977:162; 1979:72; Brown 1979:47; Dunn 1982:330; 1991a:316,318f; 1991b:228f; Loader 1992:168, 228; Smith 1995:133. Although we disagree with Fennema 1979:268 that the issue was *monotheism per se*, we nonetheless concur wholeheartedly that the reason that 'the Jews' found Jesus' claims blasphemous was their refusal to accept that he is God's agent. (It must be admitted that even the present author previously accepted the scholarly consensus that

manner that detracts from the glory due to the only God: in the rest of part two we shall seek to show that the issue in the relevant controversy material, rather than being about the oneness of God or monotheism, is consistently about whether Jesus is the Messiah, and about whether he '*makes himself* God' or '*makes himself* equal to God' (John 5:18; 10:33; cf. 8:53).[26] John's development of Logos and other such ideas and motifs, we shall argue, represents the result of this conflict rather than its cause, part of John's attempt to show the legitimacy of the beliefs which Jewish opponents were calling into question and objecting to.

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monotheism was at issue in the Johannine conflict - cf. McGrath 1997c:105).

[26] Segal 1986:156 not only sets forth as alternatives what are in fact complementary (i.e., he fails to recognize that both messiahship and 'divinity' in some sense may be at issue), but also compares the status of the Johannine Jesus with the place given to a principle angel in apocalyptic and mystical Judaism. On this last point we agree, but disagree about whether presenting Jesus in this way was controversial in and of itself.

CHAPTER 4

GOD'S EQUAL OR GOD'S AGENT? (JOHN 5)

4.1 Evidence of Legitimation

John chapter 5 provides a natural starting point for an examination of Johannine christology in relation to legitimation, as in this chapter we are given numerous indicators both of some of the points at issue in the christological controversy, and of the ways the Fourth Evangelist sought to respond to them. Under the guise of 'the Jews', the contemporary opponents of the Johannine Christians are allowed to raise their objections.[1] As Loader rightly points out, the accusations brought in this chapter "are doubtless...real accusations hurled at the Johannine community by Jewish critics."[2] The Johannine Jesus then provides a response to these Jewish objections, a defence or legitimation of Johannine Jesus-belief. As Beasley-Murray writes, "We may assume that 5:17-30 owes its present shape to its use in the defense and proclamation of Johannine preachers to Jews, who assailed Christians for their understanding of the sabbath and still more their beliefs about Jesus. Similarly we may see in 5:31-47 a prime example of the missionary apologetic of Christians to Jews, who wanted to know on what basis they

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[1] Cf. Lindars 1972:219; Martyn 1977:162; 1979:123; Witkamp 1985:33; Meeks 1990:309; Loader 1992:161. This is not to say that this is a symbolic portrayal of an actual event in the community's history; rather, like Plato's account of the trial of Socrates, ideas are being defended via an ostensibly historical narrative. On ancient biographies and apologetic cf. further Burridge 1998:122,135-137.

[2] Loader 1992:161.

maintained their belief in Jesus as the promised Messiah of God."[3] Beasley-Murray is correct to see an apologetic thrust here: the beliefs of the community are being 'put on trial' by Jewish objectors,[4] and what is being mounted here is a defence of Johannine Jesus-belief, which is coupled with a denunciation of their opponents' unbelief (5:37-47). Dodd also rightly classes 5:19-30 as an *apologia*,[5] and, in Becker's words, in 5:31-47 "geht es um die Legitimation des Gesandten."[6] Similarly Talbert writes that "This large thought unit reflects an apologetic *Sitz im Leben* in the life of the Johannine community".[7] There is thus much support for the conclusion that the whole passage (John 5:19-47) represents one of the clearest examples in John of the Evangelist engaging in legitimation, in the defence of his community's beliefs about Jesus, and we thus feel justified in including it for treatment here.[8]

4.2 The Subject of the Conflict

4.2.1 Relationship to Earlier Tradition

In order to ascertain exactly what is at issue in the conflict with 'the Jews' in John 5, we must consider the relationship of

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[3] Beasley-Murray 1987:80, followed by Witherington 1995:134. See also Carson 1991:90-92; Pryor 1992:27; Moloney 1996:12,28.

[4] On the trial motif in John see Harvey 1976. See also Becker 1979:249; Brown 1979:67f; Loader 1992:165.

[5] Dodd 1953:327.

[6] Becker 1979:249.

[7] Talbert 1992:130.

[8] Cf. also Barrett 1978:257, who quotes Lightfoot's description of 5:19-47 as a "defence of Christian monotheism". As we have emphasized in ch.3, we do not feel this was what was at issue, and hope to demonstrate that there is, at the very least, no clear evidence that 'the Jews' felt that the Johannine Christians had *abandoned Jewish monotheism*.

the miracle story which John recounts in this chapter to earlier tradition. As we have already emphasized earlier, the relationship between the Johannine conflicts and those attested in earlier New Testament writings is crucial for our model of development.

The similarity between this Johannine miracle story and that found in Mark 2:1-12 (and parallels) is noted by most commentators.[9] These similarities do not necessitate that a direct literary dependence by John on one or more of the Synoptic Gospels be posited,[10] but do at least suggest that here the Fourth Evangelist is dependent on a very similar tradition, and perhaps an independent version of the same basic story. The indicators that this is in fact the case are many.

(1) In the Johannine narrative we have an invalid, someone who may well have been a paralytic in view of the reference to paralytics immediately prior to his being introduced, and also of his difficulty in getting into the water (John 5:3-7; cf. Mark 2:3).

(2) Jesus heals him by telling him to get up, pick up his mat and walk (John 5:8;[11] Mark 2:9-11[12] - the two Greek sentences are practically identical, the only difference between them being an additional **καὶ** in the Marcan version).

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[9] So e.g. Brown 1966:208f; Lindars 1972:52f,209; Gnilka 1983:39; Beasley-Murray 1987:71f; Perkins 1989:959; Painter 1991:181; Neirynck 1992:54f; Pryor 1992:25f; see also Dodd 1963:174-177; Smith 1984:116-122; Witkamp 1985; Borgen 1996a:106f.

[10] Cf. Dodd 1963:174-180.

[11] ἔγειρε ἆρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει.

[12] ἔγειρε *καὶ* ἆρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει.

(3) In John this occurs on a Sabbath (John 5:9f; cf. Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-4; Lk.13:10-16, which are not part of the same story but which nonetheless show that controversy concerning healing on the Sabbath is also a traditional motif rather than a Johannine creation).[13]

(4) Jesus is accused of blasphemy and/or of doing what only God can do (John 5:16-18; Mark 2:7).

(5) He speaks with the man about sin and being made well (John 5:14; Mark 2:5-11).

(6) It may also be significant that both Mark 2:10 and John 5:27 speak of the authority of the Son of Man.

Borgen notes the following further parallels with other strands in the Marcan/Synoptic tradition:[14]

John		Mark	
5:10	Σάββατόν...οὐκ ἔξεστιν	2:24	τοῖς σάββασιν...οὐκ ἔξεστιν
5:6	ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς...λέγει	2:5	ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς...λέγει

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[13] Borgen 1987:88b; 1996a:140-144 notes that the Johannine Sabbath controversy in John 5 has the same form as is found in the Synoptics. Lindars 1972:209 suggests that John was dependent on the whole section Mark 2:1-3:6, which was already known as a unit in the pre-Markan tradition (on which see further below). Fortna 1988:115-117 regards the phrase 'Now that day was a Sabbath' as a redactional addition by the Evangelist to his Signs Source, but even if this is correct this does not change the fact that the motif is traditional, as we have already demonstrated.

[14] Borgen 1996a:143f. See also Neirynck 1992:54.

5:16,18	The Jews persecute and plan to kill Jesus	3:6	The Pharisees and Herodians discuss destroying Jesus

John thus seems to be familiar, if not with the same story as is narrated in Mark and the other Synoptics, then at the very least with a similar tradition.

Nevertheless, some commentators feel that the differences outweigh the similarities. For example, Brown considers that, "outside of the basic fact that the sick person is a man who cannot walk and that Jesus tells him to stand up, pick up his mat and walk (a not unexpected directive to a healed paralytic), the two stories are quite diverse."[15] He mentions three differences which he regards as decisive in leading to the conclusion that "the Johannine story does not refer to the same incident as the Synoptic story".[16] These are the differences:

(1) In setting: Capernaum vs. Jerusalem

(2) In local details: a man brought to a house by his friends and lowered through the roof vs. a man lying at the side of a pool

(3) In emphasis: a miracle illustrative of Jesus' power to heal sin vs. a healing with only a passing reference to sin (5:14)[17]

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[15] Brown 1966:208.

[16] Brown 1966:209.

[17] Brown 1966:208f.

To this list may be added several additional points noted by Sanders (although Sanders only feels that these differences preclude direct literary dependence between John and Mark, and not the sort of dependence on divergent forms of the same original tradition which we are proposing):

(4) In Mark the man has four friends, in John nobody.

(5) In Mark they take the initiative, in John Jesus does.

(6) In Mark Jesus sees their faith, in John faith is not mentioned.

(7) In Mark Jesus forgives the man before healing him, in John Jesus heals him and then warns him not to go on sinning.

(8) In Mark Jesus gives offense by telling the man he is forgiven, in John by breaking the Sabbath (not mentioned in Mark 2) and making himself equal to God (although Sanders notes that this last point is at least implied in Mark 2:7).

Points (1) and (2) collapse into one, since they are both explicable as changes made in order to allow the incident to occur in Jerusalem, as do the other Johannine accounts of conflicts with 'the Jews'; indeed, nearly the whole of the Fourth Gospel is set in Jerusalem. The third point (3) is weak, inasmuch as it is a similarity as much as a difference: although John's emphasis differs from that of the Synoptic story, not only does he mention sin and healing in connection with one another, but there is in addition a fundamental continuity in the issue being addressed by both the Johannine

and Marcan narratives, namely the issue of whether Jesus blasphemously claims to do what only God can do.[18]

Dodd, in contrast to Sanders (point 6), feels that the Johannine account's discussion of the man's will to be healed, and participation in the healing process by responding to Jesus' call for him to get up and walk, parallels the calls for or discussions of faith in Mark 2 and other similar healing narratives.[19] Further, as Brown notes (point 3, in contrast with Sanders, point 7), the question of the relationship between sin and suffering *is* addressed, albeit differently.

In connection with a number of the points raised, it should be noted that neither Brown nor Sanders considers the possibility that here John may perhaps be drawing on *more than one* traditional story, which he is then altering or conflating in order to be used as a foundation for a theological discourse. Lindars and Witkamp have argued that John is familiar not only with the story in Mark 2:1-12, but with the whole section Mark 2:1-3:6,[20] which may have already been linked in pre-Marcan tradition.[21] The Synoptics combine stories, and we should not be surprised to find the Fourth Evangelist doing so as well.

It is also likely that John will have edited his source material, rather than simply incorporating it *in toto* into his

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[18] See further our discussion below.

[19] Dodd 1963:177. See however Beasley-Murray 1987:74, who apparently interprets Dodd's meaning differently than I have.

[20] Cf. Lindars 1972:209f; Witkamp 1985. See also Smith 1984:117.

[21] Cf. further Dewey 1985.

Gospel.[22] This may account for the remaining differences, since there is no reason to think that John's dependence upon tradition here can only be demonstrated if he made no alterations to the tradition which he inherited. As Barrett points out, "disagreement does not prove lack of knowledge; all it proves is disagreement, and it often presupposes knowledge."[23] John's version, where the man complains that he has no one to help him into the water (John 5:7), reads like an intentional contrast to Mark 2:3f, where the man has friends to help him. Lindars rightly notes that the mention of the man's pallet (κράβαττόν) comes unexpectedly and is somewhat redundant in John, whereas it is central in the Markan narrative. Its presence is best explained by supposing that John preserved it from a tradition he inherited, in which it was an essential part of Jesus' pronouncement.[24] Given that John is setting up a contrast with the healing story in chapter 9, many of the differences are explicable in terms of Johannine editorial activity aimed at bringing out the parallels between the two narratives.[25]

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[22] Cf. the discussion in Witkamp 1985; Borgen 1996a:148f. On John's creative use of his sources see also Renner 1982:157f, 162.

[23] Barrett 1995:120. Whereas Barrett is here arguing for John's dependence on Mark, a suggestion which I still find unconvincing, he is nonetheless right to emphasize that it is the character of the similarities rather than the differences which are crucial in determining dependence. Even if John *is* directly dependent on one or more of the Synoptics, this in no way weakens our case, and perhaps strengthens it even further.

[24] Lindars 1972:210.

[25] Culpepper 1983:139f notes as points of contact between the healing stories in John 5 and 9: Jesus taking the initiative, the presence of a pool, the Sabbath issue, the invitation of belief subsequent to the healing and the topic of the relation between sin and suffering. Given that these are key areas of difference between John and Mark, these elements are probably best regarded as the result of the editorial activity of the Fourth Evangelist.

None of the objections raised proves that John was not dependent on a tradition akin to that preserved in Mark, as Sanders himself concedes: the differences probably suggest that there was no direct literary dependence, but do not preclude an original common tradition lying behind both.[26] Thus given that, as Lindars notes, "The verbal similarity between 5.8-9a and Mk 2.9, 11-12a is so close that it can scarcely be doubted that an almost identical source lies behind them both",[27] it seems best to follow the majority of scholars in regarding John as dependent on traditional material similar to that found in Mark 2, and very probably traditions akin to those found elsewhere in the Synoptics as well.

4.2.2 The Focus of the Conflict

The reason for discussing the relationship between John and earlier tradition at such length is that certain scholars regard the issue which is addressed here in John, in connection with the Sabbath healing, as being fundamentally different from that addressed in John's source and in the Synoptics: in the view of Bultmann and Neyrey, for example, the earlier concern was with the sin of Sabbath breaking, whereas the Fourth Evangelist's concern is with blasphemy.[28] In other words, in the Synoptics, and in the pre-Johannine tradition known to the Fourth Evangelist, the concern is with a humanitarian principle, whereas the focus in John is christological.

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[26] Sanders 1968:161.

[27] Lindars 1972:209. Although see also Pryor 1992:25f.

[28] Bultmann 1971:247; Neyrey 1986:154f; 1988:15-18. See also Smith 1984:121; Painter 1991:185f; Weiss 1991:311; Pryor 1992:26.

However, this line of argument ignores the fundamental similarity between the issue addressed on the basis of the miracle account in both John and the Synoptics. In the Marcan version (and parallels), Jesus is accused of *blasphemy*[29] because he is claiming to forgive sins, something which in the objectors' opinion only God can do. In John, through the inclusion of the Sabbath motif, the issue is brought into focus by means of a claim that Jesus, like God, can work on the Sabbath.[30] The basic claim being made is essentially identical, namely, that Jesus is capable of doing what only God can do, which 'the Jews' find objectionable.[31]

This element is an essential part of the tradition, and does not represent a Johannine alteration of an earlier tradition which did not address the question of Jesus claiming divine prerogatives. As Meeks writes, "It was not only the Johannine Christians who made such connections...Already in Mark hostility against Jesus is first aroused by his claim to exercise a prerogative - to forgive sins - that is God's alone (Mark 2:7), and the actual plot against his life springs, as in John, from a Sabbath healing (3:6)...Yet, the Fourth Gospel is the first document we have that focuses so intently on this

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[29] An accusation of blasphemy is not explicitly made in John 5, although it is made elsewhere in John in passages closely related to this one (cf. 10:33; also 8:58f). See further Fennema 1979:266, and our treatment of these passages below, chs. 5 and 6.

[30] The background to this idea is discussed in sufficient detail elsewhere. See e.g. Dodd 1953:320-322; Lindars 1972:218; Moloney 1978:69f; Talbert 1992:123f; Borgen 1996b:106f. Primary sources include *Gen. Rab.* 11:10; *Exod. Rab.* 30:6,9; *Aboth* 4:22; Philo, *Leg.All.*1:5-7,16-18; *Cher.* 86-90; *Migr.* 91; *Heres* 170.

[31] On the similarity between John and Mark in the question of Jesus' authority cf. Lindars 1972:218f. Note also MacGregor 1928:173f; and see too de Boer 1996:59 (and also Harvey 1982:171) on the charge of 'blasphemy' as a point of continuity between John and earlier Christian writings.

issue. No other first-century writing concerns itself so explicitly and extensively with the relationship between Jesus and God."[32] What is different from the Synoptics, then, is the fact that John provides a lengthy response to the objections, whereas in the Synoptics the miracle itself is deemed sufficient to silence opposition and legitimate Jesus' actions.[33] It seems likely, then, that the difficulties which some had with the claims made for Jesus by Christians, as are reflected already in the Synoptics, became even more problematic as time went on, so that John needed to explicitly address the issue in a fuller way.[34]

4.2.3 The Accusation of 'The Jews'[35]

Before we can proceed, we must consider further the accusation which is brought by 'the Jews'. Commentators seem to be more or less unanimously agreed that the phrase in 5:18, πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεόν ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ, means something like, "He was calling God his own Father, *thereby* making himself equal with God."[36] However, while this is obviously a possible

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[32] Meeks 1990:309.

[33] On appeal to miracles to justify halakhic positions see Weiss 1991:314; Talbert 1992:123. John does not completely reject this approach: see 10:37f. The issue in both Mark and John is Jesus' *authority* or *authorization by God* to do what he has done.

[34] Martyn writes that John 5:19-47 "is designed (in part) to show the synagogue how the separated Jewish Christians can make a high christological claim for Jesus without abrogating monotheism" (1979:123). We have seen reason to question whether the issue in John's time was really one of abrogating monotheism, but Martyn is clearly right to conclude that John is seeking to defend his beliefs against Jewish objections.

[35] Much of this section is to be published in McGrath 1998b.

[36] Brown 1966:212; Martyn 1990:310; Painter 1991:179,306. See also Lindars 1972:219; Beasley-Murray 1987:74; Meeks 1990:310; Carson 1991:249.

translation *grammatically*, from the perspective of cultural anthropology it is extremely difficult to maintain. In first century Jewish and other Mediterranean cultures, a claim to sonship would immediately imply obedience and dependence, not equality.[37]

We may note the following important texts as evidence: Epictetus, the first century Stoic philosopher, wrote:

> Bear in mind that you are a son. A son's profession is to treat everything that is his as belonging to his father, to be obedient to him in all things, never to speak ill of him to anyone else, nor to say or do anything that will harm him, to give way to him in everything and yield him precedence, helping him to the utmost of his power.[38]

Ben Sira says,

> Whoever glorifies his father will have long life...he will serve his parents as his masters...Do not glorify yourself by dishonouring your father, for your father's dishonour is no glory to you...Whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer.[39]

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[37] Cf. Davies 1992:129-131; Malina 1993:2-4; also Harvey 1982:159. See also Philo, *Conf. Ling.* 63, which is of great significance for our discussion, as can be seen below p.132. I am grateful to Ramsay Michaels for pointing out to me Heb. 5:8 as a possible parallel to the traditional understanding of John 5:18. Nevertheless, there the issue seems to be whether Jesus' special relationship with God exempts him from suffering, not his 'equality with God'.

[38] Epictetus, *Dissertations* 2.7 (quoted Davies 1992:130).

[39] Ben Sira 3:6-16.

Philo asserted that

> men who neglect their parents should cover their faces in shame...For the children have nothing of their own which does not belong to the parents, who have either bestowed it upon them from their own substance, or have enabled them to acquire it by supplying them with the means.[40]

Syriac Menander wrote,

> Listen every day to the words of your father and mother, and seek not to offend and dishonour them; for the son who dishonours and offends his father and mother, God ponders his death and his misfortune. Honour your father in the proper way...[41]

He also advises parents,

> if your son grows out of his boyhood brutish, crude and insolent, thievish, deceitful and provocative, teach him the profession of gladiator and put into his hand a sword and dagger, and pray for him, that he shall die, shall be killed, immediately, lest - by his living on - you should grow old through his frauds and expenses, while he does

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[40] Philo, *Dec.* 118. The similarity between what is asserted here and John 5:19,30 is also significant.

[41] Sentences of the Syriac Menander 2.20-24.

> not produce anything good for you. Every bad son should die and not live on.[42]

Slightly later he has Homer's companions ask, "whosoever will smite his father, what will happen to him?", to which Homer replies: "This has not happened, and so it cannot be taken into account, for a son who beats his father does not exist."[43] He also denounces as a bad son a son who "prays for your [i.e. his father's] death, since through your death he will receive honour, and will occupy your position, and will live on your goods at will."[44] The Hebrew Scriptures share similar assumptions concerning sonship, as we see in Deuteronomy 21:18, where "a rebellious son" is one "who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother."

To make an assertion of sonship would thus imply submission and obedience, and to make oneself equal to one's father (i.e. to claim the unique prerogatives of one's father and thereby detract from one's father's honour) would be to make oneself a rebellious son, one who was behaving in a way totally inappropriate to a son.[45] It is thus better to take the

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[42] Sentences of the Syriac Menander 2.34-44. This text clearly shows that if a son behaved in this way, and did not produce anything good for his parents, he was generally accepted to be a *bad* son.

[43] Sentences of the Syriac Menander 2.87-92. In the immediate context (vv94f) he adds, "More than everything love your father, you shall fear him and honour him".

[44] Sentences of the Syriac Menander 2.198-201. Here we see clearly that, as long as the father lived, the son was subordinate. We may perhaps follow the logic of the saying in reverse and conclude that 'making oneself equal to one's father' was akin to wishing the father were dead. See also Bailey 1983:162ff,195ff for some further useful comments on sonship in relevant cultures.

[45] Odeberg 1929:203 claims to cite rabbinic parallels which demonstrate that the rabbis designated a rebellious son as 'making himself equal to his father'. However, this phrase does not actually appear anywhere in the early rabbinic corpus. For further discussion of this topic see McGrath 1998b.

participle ποιῶν in John 5:18 as a concessive participle, which would mean that the phrase as a whole be given a sense something like, "He claimed that God was his[46] Father, yet at the same time made himself equal with God".[47] Jesus has claimed to be God's son; the Jews are accusing him of not behaving in a way appropriate to sonship, because he is claiming for himself his Father's unique prerogatives. In other words, what 'the Jews' find objectionable is not Jesus' claim to be God's son, but the fact that he has put himself in the place of God; this is made even more objectionable by being coupled with a claim to a title which is only appropriate for one who, rather than making himself equal with God, submits to him and obeys him. 'The Jews' are thus accusing Jesus of behaving in a way that discredits or tells against his spoken claims. This suggestion fits well with what we find elsewhere in John: similar accusations, which appeal to the actions of Jesus in order to discount his claims, can be found, for example, in John 8:13;

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[46] There is no reason to think that ἴδιον should be regarded as emphatic here, since in Koine Greek it was often used in a reduced sense to mean simply 'his'. Cf. Sanders 1968:99 n.3; 164 n.3. At any rate, if the word 'own' is given its full force it still simply indicates that Jesus claimed a special relationship with God, while at the same time discrediting that claim by his actions.

[47] John 10:33 is an example of the use of a participle in a very similar way in a similar context. See also John 19:7, where, however, the designation 'Son of God' may have Davidic Messianic sonship primarily in mind (as also in 20:31), as one would expect in the passion narratives, where political themes come to the fore. While it is unclear what law the Jews appeal to as a capital crime, that the problem which the Jews bring to Pilate is Jesus' claim to be the Messiah seems likely (note also the tradition in *b.* Sanh 93b that Bar Kochba was put to death because he did not perform the signs expected of the Messiah). It still seems most likely in our view that John is seeking to defend the legitimacy of the claims made for Jesus the Messiah, and that any moves beyond traditional categories are a result of his attempt to defend this belief. Also significant is that the same language is used here as in 5:18 and 10:33: Jesus is accused of 'making himself', that is to say, of 'claiming to be' or 'putting himself in the place of', God's Son and agent, when in fact 'the Jews' are convinced that he is not (see further Meeks 1990:310). Unfortunately space will not permit a full treatment of this verse here.

9:16,24; 10:33.[48] The interpretation we have suggested not only fits with the first century Mediterranean cultural context, as we have already seen, but as we shall demonstrate shortly, also coheres with the response which the Johannine Jesus goes on to give to the Jews' accusation.

Before proceeding, we may note some of the evidence that is available concerning Jewish views on human beings claiming equality with God. Even in the Old Testament, to grasp at equality with God was regarded as sinful hubris (cf. Gen. 3:5f; 2 Chr.24:24; Isa.14:13-15; 40:18,25; Ezek. 28:2; 29:3). Philo expresses a similar opinion,[49] as does the author of 2 Maccabees, who places these words in the mouth of a repentant Antiochus: "It is right to be subject to God, and no mortal should think that he is equal to God."[50] On the other hand, Beasley-Murray notes the Rabbinic discussion of Pharaoh, where Moses is made 'as God' to Pharaoh, whereas because Pharaoh makes himself as God he must learn that he is nothing.[51] He concludes that "It would seem that in their eyes God could exalt a man to be as God, but whoever *made himself* as God called down divine retribution on himself. They saw Jesus in the latter category."[52]

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[48] Note also 7:27,41f,52, where accusations of a similar sort are made, based on a contrast between what seems to be implied by Jesus' actions/words, and his background.

[49] Philo, *Leg. All.* 1.49. *Leg. ad Gaium* 114 is also of some relevance. See also Josephus, *Ant.* 19.1.1f.

[50] 2 Maccabees 9:12.

[51] *Tanh. B* §12, on Exod.7:1; cited Beasley-Murray 1987:75.

[52] Beasley-Murray 1987:75. See also Carson 1991:249; Koester 1995:87.

To sum up, it appears that for *any* son to place himself on an equal standing with his *father* would be regarded as disrespectful; thus for Jesus to claim to be *God's* son while also apparently *making himself equal* with God would have been wholly unacceptable to his Jewish interlocutors.[53] The key issue does not appear to have been equality with God *per se*, but whether Jesus is *making himself* equal with God. That is to say: 'the Jews' do not regard Jesus as someone appointed by God, who would thus bear God's authority and speak and act on his behalf, but as one who seeks his own glory, a messianic pretender who blasphemously puts himself on a par with God.

4.3 The Johannine Response

4.3.1 The Obedient Son/Agent

Now we turn to the Johannine response to these objections, in the first part of which the Evangelist makes use of the imagery and categories of sonship and agency.[54] The presentation of Jesus as God's Son and agent was already part of Christian tradition prior to John, as we have already seen.[55] It would seem that John is here drawing out the implications of the agency concept in a much fuller way than any before him had done, making the principle of agency (that the one sent is like the one who sent him) a *central christological theme* in a way that earlier writers did not do or did not do as fully. This

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[53] For a pagan parallel see Apollodorus (1.9.7), who writes concerning the hero Salmoneus, he "was arrogant and wanted to make himself equal to Zeus, and because of his impiety he was punished; for he said that he was Zeus". However, 'god-equal' can also have a positive sense in some non-Jewish literature; see Dodd 1953:325f.

[54] Cf. Meeks 1967:303f; Harvey 1976:88-92; Létourneau 1993:233-255,324.

[55] Above 2.2.4.

motif is combined with the generally accepted idea in contemporary culture that an obedient son will imitate his father and do what he sees his father doing.[56] The Evangelist argues on the basis of these concepts that Jesus is not a disobedient or rebellious son; the fact that he does what his Father does demonstrates not rebelliousness, but rather obedience. As Brown writes, "He is not a rebellious son setting himself up as a rival to the Father; rather, he is completely dependent on the Father and claims nothing on his own."[57] The implication which is then drawn out of the traditional motifs which John uses here is that, as Son and Agent, Jesus can legitimately be regarded as carrying out functions which were traditionally considered to be divine prerogatives: working on the Sabbath, giving life,[58] judging,[59] and so on. And whereas for a son to usurp the honour due to his father would be to become a rebellious son, because the son has been appointed as the father's agent, he is to be honoured, respected and obeyed as if he were the father himself. The one sent is to be regarded and honoured as the one who sent him.[60] John emphasizes

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[56] Some useful background texts are discussed by Dodd 1968:32-38. See also Harvey 1982:160, and Philo, *Conf. Ling.* 63, which is quoted and discussed on p.132 below.

[57] Brown 1966:218, commenting on v19.

[58] On giving life as a divine prerogative cf. Lightfoot 1956:142; Meeks 1967:304; Lindars 1972:222; Gnilka 1983:42; Beasley-Murray 1987:76. See also e.g. 2 Kgs. 5:7, and Midrash on Psalm 78:5 (cited Meeks 1967:304 n.1).

[59] Cf. Brown 1966:219. This of course refers to judgment in an ultimate, eschatological, final sense; the idea that human beings act as judges in a more limited sense is not at issue. See also Deut. 1:17, and n.62 below.

[60] See the discussion above 2.2.4. The Johannine argument has been summarized well by a number of scholars: Jesus does not *make himself* equal with God, but he is equal (in authority) to God because *God* has made him so, by appointing him as his agent and sending him (so e.g. Brown 1979:47 n.80; Barrett 1982a:24; Neyrey 1986:155-159; Loader

these aspects of the Jesus tradition to make the point that Jesus resembles an agent appointed by God rather than a rebel against God, because he is constantly pointing attention away from himself to the Father who sent him.

In addition, John can attempt to reinforce the legitimacy of the attribution of various divine prerogatives to Jesus through the fact that it would have been accepted by many of the Evangelist's contemporaries that God had, on occasion, delegated the authority to carry out at least some of these acts: prophetic figures like Elijah in the Hebrew Scriptures were believed to have restored the dead to life through God's power,[61] and the apocalyptic figure of the Son of Man was thought of as judge.[62] The Fourth Evangelist does not appear to be arguing his point here strictly on the basis of certain unique christological claims, but also appeals to what is true in general of father/son relationships,[63] and which could (in theory, at least) also apply to others, although the Evangelist would certainly have regarded Jesus as God's Son and Agent *par excellence*. Yet although Jesus has been delegated an authority

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1992:160f; Pryor 1992:27; Ashton 1994:72; de Boer 1996:59). Cf. also Koester 1995:87.

[61] Although this was an exception rather than a rule; cf. Lindars 1972:222. Neyrey notes later Jewish traditions that God granted to Elijah and Elisha three keys that he normally reserved to himself: the rain, the womb and the grave (Neyrey 1988:75; cf. *b. Ta'an* 2a; *b. Sanh.* 113a; *Midr. Ps.* 78.5; also Barrett 1978:260). Figures to whom God delegated his own prerogatives are the only ones that are designated explicitly as 'agents' (Heb. *shaliach*) by the later rabbis.

[62] Already in the Old Testament the Messiah had begun to be thought of as (eschatological) judge: see e.g. Isa. 11:1-5. Note also 1QSb 5:24f (cited Ellis 1994:196 n.22). We shall return to the Evangelist's use of the designation 'Son of Man' in 5:27 below, 4.3.2.

[63] Dodd 1969:31f. *Contra* Beasley-Murray 1987:75, although a combination of the two approaches may be best: the Evangelist is using imagery which is true of sonship in general, but is clearly using it to argue a specifically christological point.

which may at least in theory be delegated at times to others, the Evangelist is broadening the area of authority being claimed for Jesus by including the idea of work on the Sabbath, which does not appear to have been claimed for any other figure in Israel's history anywhere in the extant literature.[64] Even if the Evangelist's argument is based on a broad principle, there is nonetheless in this passage an accentuation and extension of earlier use of sonship and agency categories in relation to Jesus. The Evangelist is appealing to traditional images and/or generally accepted ideas, and although his argument would carry more weight for those who already accepted the Christian position that Jesus is God's Son and agent, the fact that the Fourth Evangelist bases his argument on general principles of agency and/or sonship suggests that even some non-Christian Jews may have found him persuasive, and at least concluded that there is nothing blasphemous or scandalous in the claims being made by the Johannine Christians for Jesus.[65]

The clearest indication that the Fourth Evangelist's appeal to tradition also represents a development of that tradition is to be found in the links between his conception of Jesus in terms of agency, and his understanding of Jesus as the one in and as whom the Logos σὰρξ ἐγένετο. Although it may seem to some inappropriate to relate the concept of Logos, mentioned only in the prologue, to the imagery used in the present

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[64] Although note the argument on the basis of David's action in Mark 2:23-28. Nonetheless, there is no hint of David having been thought to work on the Sabbath because God does. Cf. Weiss 1991:313.

[65] So rightly Theobald 1988:377f. Note also Scroggs 1988:68, who observes that the designation 'Son' in John "functions *in conflict settings* and thus must reflect arguments about titles between John's community and the synagogue".

chapter, in fact there are a number of important conceptual links between them,[66] and it must also be stressed that, inasmuch as the Gospel in its present form is concerned, the Evangelist would have expected his readers to be familiar with the prologue and the theology expressed therein. As Barrett and others have rightly stressed, John intends the whole of his Gospel to be read in light of the prologue.[67] It would thus seem that the Fourth Evangelist would expect his readers to think of Jesus as not only God's *human* agent, but as God's unique agent, the Logos, 'become flesh'.[68]

Even as early as Deutero-Isaiah, we find agency language associated with God's Word (Isa. 55:11). In later Jewish literature, Wisdom[69] is presented in terms that are rightly

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[66] Note esp. Borgen 1987, who discusses a number of such aspects, including links with Jewish interpretations of Genesis, creation, agency, participation in divine activity and seeing God. So also Cadman 1969:79; Minear 1993:143f. Borgen 1987:92 also suggests that 1:1-18 may be understood as a demonstration that Moses wrote about Jesus (i.e. in Gen. 1-2; cf. John 5:46). For other connections between the prologue and the present passage see Epp 1975:142, who notes similar themes and material in connection with the following topics (among others): the witness of the Baptist, the contrast between Moses/Torah and Jesus, and God being unseen by human beings. Brodie 1993:242 sees three divisions in both the prologue and the discourse in 5:16-47, namely creation, witness and glory, and even goes so far as to write, "The discourse as a whole, with its three basic divisions, is a variation on the prologue", which almost certainly overstates the case, but nonetheless rightly recognizes important similarities.
The prologue's theology is closely related to that of the rest of the Gospel, as e.g. Robinson 1984a; Minear 1993:142 and Harris 1994 note, and it is wrong to assume, as does Ashton 1991:353 n.51, that the Prologue represents a viewpoint that is significantly more developed than that of the rest of the Gospel. While designations such as 'Son' and 'Son of Man' are clearly traditional, 'Logos' represents Wisdom categories and imagery which can be traced back just as early, to the pre-Pauline strata of the tradition (see our discussion above 2.2.1).

[67] Cf. Barrett's point (1978:156) that the Evangelist intended the whole of the Gospel to be read in light of the prologue. He is followed in this by Pryor 1992:7. Moloney approaches the passage in a similar way when he writes, "The claim of Jesus is blasphemy to "the Jews"...but not to the reader who knows that Jesus is the Word become flesh, who has taken up his dwelling among us (see 1:14)" (1996:8). See also Minear 1993:142; below p.162.

[68] On the relationship of John's Wisdom motifs to earlier Christian tradition see our discussion of this point above 2.2.1.

[69] "Spirit, Wisdom and Logos were all more or less synonymous ways of speaking of God's outreach to man" (Dunn 1989:266). This point is also made by Schimanowski 1985:75-77; Scott 1992:94; Talbert 1993:45f.

regarded as falling within the sphere of agency categories, and the association is particularly close in connection with creation.[70] That the role of the Logos in Philo can also be correctly brought under the heading of agency seems clear from the designations which Philo uses, such as 'mediator', 'angel/messenger', 'ruler' and 'governor or administrator'.[71] That many aspects of these contemporary Jewish portraits of God's Word or Wisdom in agency categories were familiar to the Evangelist is clear from the prologue.

Although there is no evidence that the Evangelist and his readers knew Philo's writings directly, the similarities between what is said by Philo concerning the Logos, and what the Fourth Evangelist writes in the prologue, are nonetheless so striking that the parallels are considered by most scholars to be significant and worth noting. The concepts, language and imagery are so similar that, even if there is no *direct* interdependence between the two, there is at the very least a shared 'world of ideas', a connection of environment or milieu, culture or tradition, which the two share in common with one another. The same point also applies to Philo's Logos concept as it relates to John 5. Most worthy of mention is *On the Confusion of Tongues* 63, where the Logos is described as follows:

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[70] See e.g. Wisd. 7:22; 8:4-6; 9:2. See further Hurtado 1988:42-44. Cf. too the depiction of Wisdom in Prov. 8:22-31.

[71] Cf. *Qu. Ex.* 2:13; *Qu. Gen.* 4.110f; *Fug.* 94-105,109; *Det.* 54. On Logos as agent in Philo see the helpful and brief discussion in Hurtado 1988:44-50.

> For the Father of the universe has caused him to spring up as the eldest son, whom, in another passage he calls the firstborn; and he who is thus born, *imitating the ways of his father*, has formed such and such species, looking to his archetypal patterns.

The significance of this statement is heightened still further when one also considers passages such as *On the Cherubim* 77, where Philo writes,

> Who...could be a more determined enemy to the soul than he who out of arrogance appropriate[s] the especial attributes of the Deity to himself? Now it is an especial attribute of God to create, and this faculty it is impious to ascribe to any created being.[72]

It is of course true, as so much recent research has stressed, that the Logos is none other than God himself in his interaction with the created order, depicted through means of personification.[73] Nonetheless, this in no way diminishes the significance of the fact that *Philo has chosen to describe the Logos as fulfilling this divine prerogative in terms of a son obediently imitating his father*. It is not impossible that the Fourth Evangelist and his community *were* aware of this (or some other similar) earlier use of father/son imagery in connection with the Logos, although this cannot be proved. However, it is

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[72] See also *Leg. All.* 3.99.

[73] Dunn 1989:176,230; Hurtado 1988:46-50.

at least clear from this passage that the principle that a son imitates his father was widely accepted - Philo does not argue for it, but simply appeals to it as the basis for his assertion about the creative activity of the Logos.[74] Philo's use of this principle in this context at the very least shows that to argue on this basis for the legitimacy of a particular figure's participation in divine activities or functions would not have appeared ludicrous, and would perhaps even have been reasonably convincing to those who shared certain presuppositions.

Thus, to sum up, the Fourth Evangelist has in this chapter taken up an element of earlier tradition, namely the idea that Jesus is God's Son and agent. In his use of it to defend the Christian view that Jesus carries out divine functions, the Evangelist has developed the motif(s) in a number of ways.

(1) In emphasizing that Jesus does these things precisely as God's agent and obedient Son, the Evangelist has stressed at the same time both the obedience and submission of the Son to the Father, and the equality of the authority of the Son (as agent) to that of the Father.[75] The resulting portrait sets up a tension between equality language and subordination language which would exert a great influence on the course of later christological development; it also lays much greater stress on Jesus as life-giver and judge than earlier works did.

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[74] And see also the parallels noted by Dodd 1968:32-38.

[75] As Anderson writes, "John's subordinate *and* egalitarian christological themes are subsumed in the same schema: *John's agency christology*. They are two sides of the same coin" (Anderson 1996:175).

(2) The Evangelist has also brought the idea of the human Jesus as God's agent into connection with the idea of Jesus as the one in and as whom God's supreme agent, the Logos, has 'become flesh'. The concept of the Logos as agent was known in the community, and this would have lent still more weight to the Evangelist's argument: because the human being named Jesus is now one with the Logos, the attribution of divine activities to Jesus is not to be considered in any way more problematic than the similar assertions made by many Jews about God's Word/Spirit/Wisdom.[76] This line of argument would have been most convincing to Christians, who already accepted that Jesus was the Messiah in whom God's Spirit or Wisdom dwelt. Nonetheless, Jews who accepted the truthfulness of contemporary Jewish portraits of the Messiah as indwelt by God's Spirit or Wisdom may also have found John's portrayal convincing. At any rate, in John the agency motif is expanded and developed, and moved onto another plane by being integrated into the Evangelist's Logos christology. Just how well integrated it was, and whether John had thought through in any detail the relationship between the sending of Jesus and the sending of the Logos from heaven, are interesting and important questions which we shall address in a later chapter.[77]

4.3.2 The Son of Man as Judge (5:27)

We may now proceed to the second of the two motifs whose development we will be considering and seeking to trace here,

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[76] That a similar logic underlies the prologue itself we will suggest in ch.7 below.

[77] See below 15.3.

namely the use of the designation 'Son of Man'. Once again, we have already seen that John is aware of and has inherited aspects of earlier Jewish and Christian thought concerning the 'Son of Man'.[78] On one level, it may seem that what the Evangelist does with the Son of Man motif here, while an attempt to legitimate a certain belief, is not particularly significant. The line of argument, on first reading, appears to be as follows: the apocalyptic Son of Man was widely accepted to carry out the role of judge, and if Jesus is the Son of Man, then he is rightly regarded as occupying the role of judge.[79] This is certainly part of what the Fourth Evangelist is arguing here, since the Evangelist is clearly appealing to the well-known apocalyptic traditions concerning the 'Son of Man'. This can hardly be denied, as in the immediate context we find:

(1) The use of 'son of man' (the anarthrous form of which, in the view of some scholars, is a direct allusion to Daniel 7:13).[80]

(2) Reference to his being given authority (to judge).[81]

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[78] Above 2.2.2.

[79] Cf. Coppens 1981:68f. See also Létourneau 1993:324f on the connections between Sonship-Agency and Son of Man ideas here.

[80] Many commentators take the anarthrous 'Son of Man' to be a direct allusion to Daniel 7:13; so e.g. Brown 1966:220; Lindars 1973:51f; Moloney 1978:81; Martyn 1979:139; Pamment 1985:60; Perkins 1991:960; Ashton 1991:361; Carson 1991:259; Davies 1992:190; Painter 1992:1873f; De Boer 1996:152. Ashton (1991:357) notes that the allusion to Daniel 7:13 would be clear even if the designation υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου were not used. See also Smalley 1968:292.

[81] Cf. Martyn 1979:139; Painter 1992:1872. Ashton 1991:358 rightly notes that Daniel itself does not explicitly say that the authority which is given to the (one like a) son of man is authority *to judge*, and thus the Evangelist shows signs of awareness of the Synoptic-type tradition, in which this is made explicit, and perhaps also other Jewish traditions and writings (so also Smalley 1968:292f; Moloney 1978:81f; De Boer 1996:152f). After reviewing the evidence, Ashton cautiously

(3) Mention in the immediate context of the resurrection of some to life and others to condemnation.[82]

This makes it seem quite likely that the Fourth Evangelist has in mind the Danielic figure as he was understood in contemporary Judaism and Christianity,[83] to which he could appeal to defend his belief that Jesus rightly and legitimately fulfills the divine prerogative of judgment. However, there may be a further aspect to John's usage, as we shall now see.

E. M. Sidebottom[84] and Robert Rhea[85] have both made the interesting suggestion that John 5:27 shows a knowledge of the Jewish work known as the *Testament of Abraham*. In this work, Abel the 'son of Adam (= Man)' is presented as 'the frightful man who is seated on the throne...he sits here to judge the entire creation, examining both righteous and sinners'.[86] The reasoning behind Abel fulfilling this role is given in the form of a statement attributed to God: "For God said, 'I do not

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concludes that there is sufficient evidence to warrant the view that by the end of the first century B.C.E. Judaism (and Christianity) had begun to coalesce the Danielic figure of the 'son of man' and the Messiah-redeemer (Ashton 1991:358-361).

[82] Lindars 1973:52 notes allusions to Danielic imagery (Dan.12:2) in the two following verses, as does Moloney 1978:81; Painter 1992:1872; De Boer 1996:152.

[83] Cf. Martyn 1979:139, who states that "In some respects John 5:27 appears to be the most "traditional" Son of Man saying in the whole of the New Testament"; see also De Boer 1996:153. In the light of these allusions, Hare's view (1990:92) that there is no evidence of Danielic influence anywhere in John, much less in this context, cannot be sustained, although he may be correct that the anarthrous form of the phrase is not used specifically or consciously to allude directly to Daniel 7:13 (see also Leivestad 1972:252).

[84] Sidebottom 1961:94f.

[85] Rhea 1990:71.

[86] *T. Abr.* A 13:2f.

judge you, but every man is judged by man'."[87] The attempt to relate the Johannine use of the phrase **υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου** in this passage specifically to Abel, *ben Adam*, 'the Son of Man/Adam', seems unnecessarily far-fetched, given that there is no other evidence for the idea of Jesus as 'Abel reincarnate' in the Fourth Gospel.[88] Nonetheless, the principle that human beings shall be judged by a human being appears to antedate this work, since it is cited by the author not only as authoritative, but as a divine oracle. The author of Acts may also show an awareness of this idea in Acts 17:31, where we find a similar emphasis on God demonstrating his justice by appointing a human being as judge.[89] Perhaps also relevant is Heb. 2:17, where Jesus' high priesthood is related to his humanity, which makes him able to sympathize with those for whom he intercedes. In Heb. 4:15f, the *enthroned* Jesus is explicitly mentioned in connection with this idea, perhaps suggesting that the author was aware of a tradition concerning the human Jesus as righteous and merciful *judge*, which he has, for the most part, adapted to his own portrait of Christ in high priestly categories. It thus becomes plausible that the Evangelist may also have in mind here the most basic meaning of the designation 'son of man', i.e. human being, and be alluding to

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[87] *T. Abr.* A 12:3.

[88] So rightly Burkett 1991:25f, criticizing the view of Roth 1985. It should also be considered possible that T. Abr. has formulated its view of Abel in response to Christian claims for Jesus. See further Sanders 1983:888 n.11b, who notes that T. Abr. shows evidence of familiarity with some parts of the New Testament, while being nonetheless "unmistakably Jewish" (1983:875).

[89] Bruce (1988:340f) notes a three-way connection between John 5:27, Acts 17:31 and Dan.7:13.

a tradition which held that God would judge humankind justly by allowing one of their own kind to judge them.[90]

This suggestion need not be understood to preclude the possibility that the phrase here also refers to the figure of the 'Son of Man' known from apocalyptic literature.[91] In fact, in the case of *Testament of Abraham*, the reference to Abel as 'that...man' seated on a throne as judge surely intends to identify Abel with '*that* Son of Man', i.e. that specific, enthroned human figure of apocalyptic expectation. These were not two mutually exclusive traditions: rather, *Testament of Abraham*, in a way that closely resembles the line of thought of the Fourth Gospel, has Abraham ask the identity of the one Daniel and Enoch saw, and the answer which he is given is that 'that Son of Man' is Abel, the Son of Adam.[92] The Fourth Evangelist frequently used words and phrases with more than one shade of meaning, and thus it would not be surprising to find him doing so here, using 'Son of Man' with overtones of both apocalyptic expectation and humanity.[93] This would also explain the lack of the definite article, so distinctive of this verse, and a feature which a few scholars have interpreted to indicate

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[90] It is perhaps also significant and worth noting that in both T. Abr. A 13:8 and John 5:31ff (see also 8:17f) there is a discussion of the legal requirement for the number of witnesses needed to confirm a legal matter. Hare, in rejecting this view (1990:95), speaks of 'son of man' as a poetic way of saying 'man', but this is not correct: there is nothing intrinsically poetic about the phrase. Rather, 'human being' is its normal sense. See the examples cited in Casey 1994. Another interesting point of contact between T. Abr. and John is the use of descent/ascent language (cf. Talbert 1992:270f; Ashton 1991:352 n.47). Cf. also Leivestad 1972:252.

[91] *Contra* Higgins 1964:167; Leivestad 1972:252.

[92] Cf. John 9:36; 12:34, where the Evangelist too addresses the current question, 'Who is this Son of Man?'.

[93] So rightly Moloney 1978:80f.

an emphasis on Jesus' humanity.[94] The background which we have posited would also explain the fact that there is an imbalance in v27: whereas all the other functions mentioned in John 5:19-30 are *shared* by both Father and Son, judgment is *delegated wholly* to the Son.[95] The best explanation for this fact is our suggestion that John knew a tradition which said that God *would not judge*, but would entrust the judgment of human beings to a human being.

Thus while John has not excluded (and had no wish to exclude) the concept of the apocalyptic 'Son of Man' as judge, the Evangelist also appears to wish the reader to recall the principle that God will show his justice by appointing a human figure as judge. This would serve to further demonstrate the legitimacy of claiming such a role for Jesus: as a human being, and as that particular human being mentioned in Daniel 7 and subsequent writings, Jesus can rightly be regarded as God's designated judge.[96] To claim that the human being Jesus will judge in no way represents an illegitimate appropriation by him of a divine prerogative, because Jewish tradition provides justification for a human figure being appointed as judge, and one stream of tradition emphasizes that by doing this God demonstrates his justice.[97] In Carson's words, "Jesus is the

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[94] So e.g. Burkett 1991:42; Hare 1990:90-96; Leivestad 1972:252; MacGregor 1928:179; Pamment 1985:60f; Sidebottom 1961:93. Carson accepts this as at least partially true. *Contra* Brown, Higgins, Lindars, Strachan.

[95] In John 5 at least. The issue is complicated slightly by the apparently contradictory point in 8:15,50.

[96] On John's awareness of and dependence on such earlier 'Son of Man' ideas see above 2.2.2.

[97] It is worth noting here that John's legitimation in this section is probably better understood in conjunction with the legitimatory/polemical thrust in 8:15,17f: whereas God's righteousness is shown through his appointing of Jesus as judge, and Jesus' righteousness is stressed through the description of him as wholly

apocalyptic Son of Man who receives from the Ancient of Days the prerogatives of Deity, a kingdom that entails total dominion. At the same time he belongs to humanity and has walked where humans walk...It is the *combination* of these features that make [sic.] him uniquely qualified to judge."[98]

> It may be worth noting the echoes which are found in John 5:27 of other important New Testament christological statements. Showing particular affinity are Philippians 2:6-11 and Matthew 28:18.[99] The former is close in particular because it is the only other New Testament occurrence of the terminology of equality with God.[100] The latter is significant inasmuch as it also echoes the language of 'giving authority' found in Daniel 7:14.[101] For our purposes we may simply note that the Fourth Evangelist is here probably indebted to a strong current in earlier Christian tradition, one which emphasized that Jesus did not grasp at authority, but was given authority by God.[102] Thus John's portrait, while distinctive in

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submitted to and obedient to the Father, 'the Jews' are presented in terms that sharply contrast this: they judge wrongly, by human standards, and by misjudging the righteous judge, condemn themselves. See also Moloney 1996:28.

[98] Carson 1991:257.

[99] I am indebted at this point to a paper by Walter Moberly entitled "The Way to Glory: Matthew and Philippians 2:6-11", read at the Durham New Testament Postgraduate Seminar on 28.04.97.

[100] Cf. e.g. Hooker 1990:97; Meeks 1990:309.

[101] So e.g. Albright and Mann 1971:362; Hill 1972:361; France 1989:291f (citing W. D. Davies); Luz 1995:139.

[102] The authority given to the Son at the end of Matthew is to be contrasted with the authority he refuses to take from Satan at the start of the Gospel (so Moberly, in the paper just cited above n.99). See too our discussion in ch.5 below, esp. 5.2.2.

> important ways, is also strongly traditional. Were this not the case the Fourth Evangelist's attempt to legitimate his community's beliefs using these motifs would have been far less effective.[103]

To sum up, John has used the single phrase **υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου** to make a double appeal: the author brings together two strands of authoritative tradition which could be used to defend the Christian standpoint that presented Jesus as carrying out the divine function of judgment. Perhaps the most significant development which is made in the process is the emphasis on the *humanity* of the one whom John elsewhere describes as *pre-existent*, and the connecting of these two emphases to the single designation, 'Son of Man'.[104] This development, while closely linked to earlier ideas about the Son of Man, nonetheless brought into sharp focus an uncertainty or difficulty which existed in this conceptuality, and which later christological formulations would need to seek to resolve. The Evangelist also uses motifs traditionally associated with the state of the *exalted* Jesus to defend the authority attributed to the *earthly* Jesus, thereby making another alteration to the

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[103] A key difference is that John uses this imagery not in relation to an authority which Jesus receives after his exaltation, but rather to the authority he wields even during his earthly life. Cf. the helpful discussion of Hartman 1987:90f.

[104] The pre-existence of the Son of Man is not mentioned here, but is clearly part of John's understanding of who the Son of Man is (3:13; 6:62). The emphasis on Jesus being a human being through the use of the same words is thus clearly a linking of pre-existence and humanity which raises numerous difficult christological questions. On the paradox of humanity and heavenly origins in relations to the designation 'Son of Man', see Walker 1994.

tradition which represents a subtle but nonetheless significant development.[105]

4.3.3 Witnesses to Jesus as God's Agent

John has thus far emphasized the legitimacy of the attribution of particular functions to an agent appointed by God. In 5:31-47 the Evangelist seeks to present arguments that Jesus is in fact God's agent. Witnesses are thus called in. John appeals to the witness of John the Baptist (who was apparently widely respected among Jews in the first century), the Father (whose works Jesus does, thus making this an appeal to signs/miracles as evidence of his agency, as is also done in Mark 2:6-12). The testimony of the Scriptures is at the same time part of the witness of the Father (whose revelation it is) and of Moses (who wrote it). John thus seeks to shift the onus back onto his opponents: have they taken seriously enough the evidence of the miracles attributed to Jesus, of the arguments from Scripture provided by Christians and of the positive witness which John the Baptist bore to Jesus? At least for the Johannine Christians, who already accept these testimonies, these points would strengthen the argument made here: not only are the status and functions attributed to Jesus by Christians not blasphemous if attributed to an agent appointed by God, but a sufficient number of witnesses attest to the fact that Jesus was in fact God's agent, thus - in the view of the Evangelist

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[105] This is not, however, simply a move from an emphasis on futurist to realized eschatology, but also marks a transition from a christology which emphasizes Jesus' authority as the exalted one to one which emphasizes his authority as the pre-existent one and in his earthly life as well. On Johannine eschatology see further Moloney 1978:79f; Kysar 1985b:198-201; Dahl 1990.

at least - clinching the case and proving that Jesus is in fact who the Johannine Christians believe him to be.

4.4 Summary

To sum up our argument in this chapter on John 5:

(1) First, we examined the traditions which form the background to John 5:1-18, the narrative which provides the starting point for Jesus' monologue in 5:19-47, and found that the issue in the earlier traditions is essentially the same as that being discussed in John, namely that of Jesus doing what it has traditionally been believed that only God can or should do.

(2) Second, we considered the Johannine response to the objections raised by 'the Jews', and found that in them the traditional motifs of Jesus as God's Son and Agent, and of Jesus as the Son of Man, were developed in a number of distinctive ways: aspects of these concepts were intensified; the idea of Jesus as agent was brought into connection with the idea of Jesus as the one in whom God's Wisdom/Spirit/Logos is decisively present, and the agency aspect of these latter conceptualities was brought to the fore; the humanity and pre-existence of the Son of Man figure were emphasized in connection with one another.

(3) Third, we noted points of connection between the issue being addressed in this part of John and the specific developments made by the Evangelist. Given that these distinctive developments occur in the context of a response to Jewish objections, it is logical to conclude

that the developments are the result of the process of legitimation. The distinctive way John uses the traditions he inherited, the way he combines various traditional motifs and ideas, and the implications he draws from them, are the result of his use of them as part of an attempt to defend his community's beliefs about Jesus.

CHAPTER 5

"I OBEY, THEREFORE 'I AM'" (JOHN 8:12-59)

5.1 Evidence of Legitimation

This is a somewhat extensive passage, but as in the case of John 5, even though much of this section is correctly regarded as an attempt to defend certain beliefs, not everything is relevant to our specific concern of how the legitimation in which the Fourth Evangelist engaged is linked to his development of inherited beliefs. The need to treat this section of the Gospel in our study is immediately indicated by its strong polemical thrust, which is noted by most scholars, as is its close relation to the Johannine disputes with the synagogue.[1] Neyrey regards the form of John 8 (which is closely linked with John 7) as "an elaborate forensic procedure against Jesus."[2] Thus, as in chapter 5, the Johannine Jesus is being 'put on trial' by 'the Jews', representing the accusation of the contemporaries of the Johannine community against them.[3] Becker classes 8:13-20 together with 5:31-47 and other passages which are about 'the legitimation of the one who has been sent'.[4] The focus of the dispute is the 'I am' statement by Jesus (which is clearly some sort of christological assertion, the meaning of which we will consider below): it is necessary

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[1] So e.g. Sanders 1968:229; Schnackenburg 1980:205; Beasley-Murray 1987:133; Witherington 1995:169.

[2] Neyrey 1988:39.

[3] Witherington 1995:168f speaks of this chapter in terms of 'judicial proceedings', 'charges' and 'defense'.

[4] Becker 1979:249; see also 286,288. Also above, 4.1.

for 'the Jews' to accept that Jesus is 'I am', or they will die in their sins (8:24); the 'lifting up' of Jesus will in some sense demonstrate that Jesus is in fact 'I am' (8:28); and in the end it is precisely as 'I am' that Jesus is rejected by 'the Jews' (8:59).[5] Much of the chapter, as we shall see, is devoted to demonstrating the legitimacy of Jesus' claims (and thus of the culpability of 'the Jews' for rejecting Jesus), and it therefore seems warranted to see an apologetic/legitimatory thrust in this section.

5.2 The Point at Issue in the Controversy

5.2.1 The Focus of the Conflict

The christological focus of this part of the Fourth Gospel is certainly to be found in its distinctive use of the absolute 'I am'.[6] There has traditionally been a large amount of agreement among scholars that this reflects the Jewish tradition, based in particular on the Old Greek translation of Isaiah, that 'I am' is a name of God. Although this view has fallen into disfavour in some circles in recent times, it is still nonetheless almost certainly correct, and continues to be supported by the majority of scholars.[7] In support it should be

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[5] Neyrey 1988:48. It is interesting, given the connection with the 'trial' of Jesus here, that the use of 'I am' in Deutero-Isaiah is in the context of Yahweh's 'lawsuit' against Israel. Cf. Schnackenburg 1980:200. Becker 1979:250 feels that the Johannine trial motif is more Hellenistic than Jewish, focusing on the defense of the accused rather than on witnesses. However, both personal defense and appeal to witnesses are found in John.

[6] Three times in this chapter (8:24,28,58); elsewhere only in 13:19. The occurrences in 6:20 and 18:5 may simply mean 'It is I' or 'That's me', although it is arguable that in these instances too there are at least some of the overtones of the absolute Johannine usage. See further Pancaro 1975:60, and also immediately below.

[7] Recent proponents of an Isaianic background to the Johannine use of 'I am' include Dodd 1953:248 (see also pp.94,377); Brown 1966:536f; Smalley 1968:295; Harner 1970, *passim*; Pancaro 1975:60; Howard 1978:385f; Moloney 1978:131f; 1996:99; Fennema 1979:270f; Schnackenburg

noted that Jesus is explicitly stated in the Fourth Gospel to bear the divine name,[8] and that the attempt to stone him after he declares 'I am' is a reaction which suggests that, from the perspective of 'the Jews', Jesus has not only made an apparently implausible - if not insane - assertion concerning himself, but has also blasphemed.[9] 'The Jews' had already reached the conclusion that Jesus was mad, but without attempting to stone him for it, the reason presumably being that in the Jewish law, madness was not a capital crime, whereas blasphemy was. In John, attempts to kill Jesus are almost invariably linked with claims to his unity/equality with God or to divine authority, which are felt to be blasphemous.[10] It is also worth noting that the climactic objection in 10:33 makes better sense if it has been preceded not only by a discussion of whether Jesus is 'equal with God' (5:18), but also by a claim that Jesus is the 'I am'. There are also a number of traditional elements present in the narrative which elsewhere in the New Testament are closely connected with the

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1980:199f; Morgan-Wynne 1980:220; Gnilka 1983:68,74; M. Müller 1984:213; Hare 1990:102; Burkett 1991:142f; Carson 1991:343; Burge 1992:355f; Pryor 1992:37; Talbert 1992:158; Twelftree 1992:77; Létourneau 1993:411-417; Fossum 1995:127f; Smith 1995:112f; Witherington 1995:175; Ball 1996, *passim*. Neyrey 1988:213-217 focuses more on Exod.3:14, but nonetheless agrees that the Johannine use alludes to the name of God in the Jewish scriptures. Fossum 1995:127 traces the LXX translation of Isaiah to the influence of Exod. 3:14.

[8] John 17:11f. The connections between the Word and Name of God are also to be taken into consideration: on this see Sidebottom 1961:39-44; Fossum 1995:113-121,125-133.

[9] Cf. e.g. Harner 1970:39; Pancaro 1975:56 (who also rightly points out (1975:63) that the attempt to stone Jesus *again* in 10:31, because he is regarded as having blasphemed, indicates clearly that here too Jesus is felt to have been guilty of blasphemy); Carson 1991:343; Brodie 1993:336.

[10] John 5:18; 7:1,19f,25; 8:37,40; 10:31. The occurrences in John 7 are linked to the events in John 5 (see 7:21-23), an indication that at some stage in the history of the material that now makes up the Fourth Gospel, ch.6 did not intervene between chs. 5 and 7.

bestowal of the divine name upon the exalted Christ, as we shall see below. All of this suggests that the absolute 'I am' is here an allusion to the divine name.

The most potent objection which has been raised against this view is probably that of Barrett. He writes concerning 8:28, "It is simply intolerable that Jesus should be made to say, 'I am God, the supreme God of the Old Testament, and being God I do as I am told'."[11] In response, it is necessary to consider the background to the Johannine use of 'I am', since it does not appear to claim that Jesus is himself the God of the Jewish scriptures, but rather that he has been indwelt by or bears the divine name.[12] Similar claims had been made for other figures in at least some Jewish circles, although nothing in the extant parallels is quite as extravagant as what we find in John.[13] Nevertheless, when one considers the statement by the angel in Apoc. Abr. 10:8, "I am Yaoel", in light of the application of the very same name to God in Apoc. Abr. 17:13, one can see how easily the statement of the angel could have been regarded by some as blasphemous, and misconstrued as a claim to be God himself.[14] But this use of the divine name by the angel, like its use by the Johannine Jesus, is not a claim

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[11] Barrett 1982b:12.

[12] So rightly Hare 1990:102. See also Howard 1978:384-386; Fennema 1979:271f.

[13] Cf. Meeks 1967:110f,193f,234-237,302; Fossum 1985; Hurtado 1988:79f.

[14] Just such a misinterpretation of Apoc. Abr. is made by Capes 1992:171, who badly misreads the passages we have mentioned. He takes the inclusion of 'Yaoel' in the hymn in 17:8-14 as an indication that the angel is included in the worship of God. But 'Yaoel' in this context is the name of God, the name which the angel bears (so rightly Ashton 1994:81). That this is the case is clear from 17:2,7, which depicts the angel as kneeling with Abraham and reciting the hymn of worship with him. The angel is among the worshippers of God and not confused with God, even though, as God's agent, he bears the name of God himself.

to be the God of the Old Testament, but to be the special, unique agent of God. The figure who bears the name of God does so as part of his empowering and commissioning as God's principal agent, and, as we have already seen, agency bestowed an equality of authority to, coupled with a complete submission to, the sender.[15] Thus, if Jesus were claiming to be none other than the eternal God of Israel, then Barrett's objection would be applicable. However, the claim being made here is more likely to be that Jesus is the bearer of the divine name, the agent upon whom God has bestowed his name.[16] John's portrait, understood in the way that we have suggested, makes excellent sense in the context of contemporary thought.[17] Of course, it may be that 'the Jews' are presented here as (mis)understanding Jesus to be simply asserting 'I am Yahweh';[18] but it seems more likely that the heart of the problem for them was the claim that the human being Jesus bore the name of God and exercised the prerogatives of God. The issue, once again, is whether Jesus is God's appointed agent who bears God's name and authority, or an upstart who claims divinity for himself (or has it claimed for him by his followers), and who is thus misusing God's name and insulting God.

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[15] See above 2.2.4 and 4.3.1.

[16] Cf. Thompson 1992:377, who argues that the designations 'God' and 'I am' applied to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel indicate that he is God's principal agent who shares in God's status and functions. See also Fennema 1979:288; Létourneau 1993:415.

[17] The reason why 'the Jews' do not attempt to stone Jesus until v59 is that they did not understand what he was claiming; for example, in vv24f they appear to have understood 'I am' as an incomplete sentence, and asked for a predicate (so Pancaro 1975:62; Barrett 1978:342; Burkett 1991:152f). See too Feuillet 1966:235f and Thompson 1992:377, who argue that the Johannine use of 'I am' is much more finely nuanced and, while a claim to divinity, is not simply equivalent to 'I am Yahweh'.

[18] So e.g. Fennema 1979:269-271.

5.2.2 Relation to Earlier Christology

That the discussion focuses around an aspect of pre-Johannine Jesus-belief can be seen from a comparison with one earlier text in particular, namely Phil. 2:6-11. In this passage there are several points of contact with the section of John we are considering:

(1) Jesus does nothing on his own but obeys his Father (John 8:28f; Phil. 2:6-8);

(2) This obedience is connected with his bearing of the divine name (John 8:28; Phil. 2:9);

(3) His bearing of the divine name is closely connected with his crucifixion and exaltation (John 8:28; Phil. 2:8ff).

The same traditional group of associations appears to also be attested in Heb.1:3f, where we find a link between Jesus' death on the cross and his exaltation, coupled with his being granted a name greater than that of any other.[19] In the christological hymns of Revelation 5 many of these ideas and images are also present.[20] These points of contact suggest that John has not developed the idea of Jesus bearing the name of God 'from scratch', but is heir to earlier traditions akin to those

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[19] It has been suggested that the 'name' which is in mind here may be 'Son' rather than 'Lord', the name of God (so e.g. Bruce 1990:50f). However, although the context does immediately suggest 'Son', the fact that 'sons of God' was a frequent designation for angels in the Jewish Scriptures and other Jewish literature suggests that the author may perhaps have had a more distinctive name in mind (see also 2:10; 12:6-8, where sons in the plural refers to Christians).

[20] So Hengel 1983:85. He notes the exaltation of Christ to the throne of God on the basis of his sacrificial death, and his receipt of the worship of all creation. To this we may add that Christ shares in the same designations as God (cf. e.g. 1:8 with 22:13), including (implicitly) 'God' in 22:9. See also the relevant parallels from other early hymnic fragments in Hengel 1983:86.

preserved elsewhere in the New Testament. It thus seems likely that, even as other similar aspects of early Christian Jesus belief became controversial with time, so too did the belief that Jesus bears the very name of God.[21]

Closely related to this is the issue, which was also to the fore in John 5, of Jesus doing what only God is believed to be able or worthy to do. This issue, as we have already seen, is firmly rooted in the synoptic tradition. Haenchen has made the interesting suggestion that John 8:51 ("Amen, amen, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death") may show knowledge of Mark 8:27-9:1.[22] Lindars reaches a very similar conclusion, confidently asserting that "the whole verse is built on the saying of Jesus which is preserved in the Synoptic Gospels in Mt. 16.28 paras."[23] This is interesting, since it would indicate that the debate in this section of John, about Jesus being the mediator or source of eternal life for believers, is also closely linked to earlier christological traditions.[24] John certainly shows a knowledge of the same or a closely related tradition in John 12:25, which is very close to Mark 8:35 and parallels.[25] In Mark 8:38-9:1, Jesus says that

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[21] Cf. Howard 1978:384-386; Kreitzer 1987:161; also Caird 1976:124. It is possible that the Fourth Evangelist (although probably not the others) may have interpreted the 'I am' of Jesus when responding at his trial (Mk. 14:62) or when crossing the sea (Mk. 6:50) as a use of the divine name, which then formed the basis for his further development of the idea. In the former instance the theme which is brought in here, the 'lifting up' or crucifixion of the Son of Man, is closely interwoven. Cf. Brown 1994:139f.

[22] Haenchen 1984:2.32. Becker recognizes the saying as traditional but is less convinced of the links with the saying preserved in Mark (1979:309).

[23] Lindars 1972:332.

[24] Cf. also Michaels 1989:154, who suggests a connection with the tradition found in mark 12:27 and parallels.

[25] Cf. also Dodd 1963:338-343.

whoever is ashamed of him and his words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he comes in his Father's glory, and that there are among those present some who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power. The points of contact with the Johannine passage we are considering here are:

(1) The reference to keeping/not being ashamed of Jesus' words (Mark 8:38; John 8:51).[26]

(2) The consequence stated in terms of tasting/seeing death (Mark 9:1; John 8:51f).[27]

(3) The closely related terminology of 'glory' and 'the Son of Man' (the glory is the Father's in both cases, although it is shared with the Son (of Man); Mark 8:38; John 8:28, 50, 54).[28]

It thus seems likely that here, as in John 5, the christological debate about who Jesus is and the claims made for him are based on, and firmly rooted in, earlier Christian traditions which underlie the narrative at many points, and

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[26] Lindars 1972:332 states that 'If anyone keeps my word' replaces 'there are some standing here', apparently failing to notice the link with the idea of remaining faithful to Jesus' word in the immediate context of the original tradition.

[27] Lindars 1972:332f rightly notes that John has subtly altered the tradition, using his preferred language of 'eternal life' ('forever') rather than the more traditional 'kingdom' language. Also significant is that the language of 'tasting death', while found in other Jewish and Christian writings, does not occur anywhere else in the Gospels outside these related passages (Lindars 1972:333). There is no reason to think, as Neyrey 1988:47 does, that the change from 'seeing' death to 'tasting' death in 8:51f represents a Jewish misconstrual of Jesus' words.

[28] Also worth mentioning is that the designation 'Son of Man' is linked in the Johannine passage with 'lifting up', a Johannine synonym for which is 'glorification'.

which form the starting point both for the debates themselves and for the responses given.[29] The claims made by Christians that Jesus bore the divine name, and was the mediator or source of eternal life, were objected to by 'the Jews', and the Fourth Gospel seeks to respond to those objections.

5.3 The Johannine Response

The ultimate confirmation for the suggestions we have made above will be if what the Evangelist has written here can be shown to make good sense when interpreted as a response to Jewish objections to aspects of Christian belief such as the ones we have been discussing. As we shall now see, there are strong indications that this is in fact the case. The key alteration which the Evangelist appears to have made to the tradition he inherited is to move earlier the bearing of the divine name by Jesus.[30] In John 8, Jesus is not going to be given the divine name when he is exalted, but bears it already even during his earthly life: his being 'lifted up' (crucified/exalted) will simply demonstrate what is already the case.

The significance of this as a response to the objections raised by 'the Jews' becomes clearer when we consider the relationship between 'the Name' of God and 'the Word' of God in Judaism. In Philo, the two are clearly equated, much in the

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[29] The similar themes to those found in Galatians may also indicate an earlier tradition underlying the discussion of descent from Abraham. This lies beyond the scope of the present study. Cf. further Pryor 1992:37f, following Dodd.

[30] One possible basis on which development may have been made is perhaps if the author read the use of 'I am' on the lips of Jesus in the earlier Synoptic tradition in light of the belief that (the exalted) Christ bears the divine name.

same way that Wisdom and Word are frequently equated in Jewish literature. One very clear example is *Conf. Ling.* 146, where Philo writes:

> But if there be any as yet unfit to be called 'son of God', let him press to take his place under God's Firstborn, the Logos, who holds the eldership among the angels, their ruler as it were. And many names are his, for he is called 'Beginning', and the '*Name of God*', and his '*Logos*'...[31]

Similarly the *Prayer of Manasseh* 3 uses Word and Name in parallelism to one another:

> He who bound the sea and established it by the command of his *word*,
>
> He who closed the bottomless pit and sealed it by his powerful and glorious *name*.

In other contemporary and later literature similar statements of equivalence are made, and even where only one of the two terms appears, God's 'Word' and 'Name' repeatedly serve the same functions, such as having been with God in the beginning, and served as the agent or instrument of creation.[32] In view of this equivalence it seems justified, if not indeed necessary,

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[31] See also *Mig.*174, where the Logos is described as the angel in whom God's name dwells, who is mentioned in Exod.23:20.

[32] See the parallels compiled in Fossum 1995:117-120. See too Ball 1996:279-282.

to regard Jesus' claim in John 8 to be 'I am', i.e. to bear the divine name, as parallel or equivalent to the Johannine portrait of him as the Word 'made flesh'.[33]

In terms of Johannine legitimation, this equivalence would have had a great importance. Neyrey notes that a distinction was made in the ancient world between gods, who were truly immortal, and divinized human beings, who could be called 'gods' but were not divine in the fullest sense.[34] If this distinction was an important one for non-Jews, so much the more was it important for Jews, for whom God was unique and clearly superior to all other beings.[35] As far as 'the Jews' were concerned, then, for someone to claim for himself the attributes of divinity was to rebel against the divine authority and deny the distinctiveness of the one true God. In responding to the objections raised, the Evangelist appears to have related the tradition that the exalted Christ was given the divine name to the tradition that he was indwelt by God's Wisdom or Word. From the combination of the two traditions he

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[33] See the point we have already made (above p.130), that the whole Gospel is to be read in light of the prologue. Burkett (1991:151) notes another possible link with the imagery of the prologue through connection with Amos 8:11f, where it is said that people will "seek the Word of Yahweh, but they will not find it", a saying which appears to be echoed in 8:21 (see also 7:33f). Also see Barrett's comments on 8:12 on the connection between 'light' (φως) and wisdom/word (1978:336f); also Boismard 1956:144f on a similar connection in relation to the prologue.

[34] Neyrey 1988:52-55,218f. He cites Plutarch, *Pelopidas* 16; *On the Malice of Herodotus* 857D; Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History*, VI.1.2.

[35] See Philo, *De Virt.* 65; *Leg. ad Gaium*, 118; *Decal.* 64f; also above 4.2.3, where we noted the unanimous disapproval of the Jewish tradition of any who 'made himself God'. In the case of 'divinized' figures like Moses, there was no question of there being any confusion between the Eternal and these other figures. Others could be called 'god(s)', but not in the fullest sense of being the eternal and only true God. The distinction is also made very clearly in the Jewish-Christian Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 2.42, which we have argued elsewhere bears a close relationship to the thought of the Fourth Gospel (cf. McGrath 1996:6).

arrived at the conclusion that Jesus did not receive the divine name when he ascended to heaven, as a human being who has undergone an apotheosis, but is rather the human being whom the eternal, imperishable Name or Word became. In a sense, the claims of Jesus are justified because, rather than it being the case that Jesus bears the divine name, one might say that *the Name bears Jesus*.[36] The human Jesus is now one with the Name of God, so that what can be predicated of the latter applies equally to the former. That this is the line of argument which the Evangelist is following is indicated by 8:23f, where the need for 'the Jews' to believe that 'I am' is directly connected with a contrast between Jesus, who is 'from above/not of this world', and his opponents, who are 'from below/of this world'.[37] We may thus suggest that the Evangelist is adapting the traditions he inherited in this way, in order to present Jesus as the one in and as whom the Name or Word has 'become flesh', one whose ultimate origin is heavenly rather than earthly and who is eternal by virtue of the divine name, and that the Evangelist seeks thereby to defend the legitimacy of Christian beliefs about Jesus.[38]

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[36] See the similar point made by Brown 1966:408 in connection with John 10 (quoted below pp.178f).

[37] Cadman 1969:110 feels that the contrast is clearly moral rather than metaphysical (especially in view of 17:14, where the disciples are said to be 'not of this world' even as Jesus is 'not of this world'). Most likely, however, in the heavenly/earthly dualism moral and metaphysical categories overlap, so that the sense must be determined by the context. There can be no doubt that, at least as far as the Gospel in its present form is concerned, Jesus (or better the one incarnate in and as Jesus) has a literal heavenly origin, has 'come down from heaven'.

[38] For the relevance of the difficult v28 to the Johannine context, cf. further Moloney 1978:137f. It is clear that John hoped that the obedience of Jesus even unto death would demonstrate the validity of Jesus' claim, and that he did all things as God's obedient Son and agent; precisely *how* he hoped that all this would become clear to his Jewish interlocutors is uncertain.

We must also note here the close connections with a theme which we have already considered at some length in connection with John 5, namely that of divine agency. In Jewish tradition, the one in whom God's name was caused to dwell was empowered and authorized to serve as God's unique agent. The clearest example of this is the angel Yaoel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, who speaks of "a power through the medium of his ineffable name in me", and then goes on to describe the various exalted functions which he carries out on God's behalf.[39] Ashton notes that, "in spite of obvious differences, Yaoel's role closely resembles that of Jesus. He too proclaims himself as sent by God and shares in the authority of his name (5:43; and 10:25). God has made him a gift of this name (17:11) and he has manifested it (17:1...) and made it known to his disciples."[40] Jesus functions as God's agent through the indwelling of God's name, and just as those who accepted the cultural principles of sonship and agency on which John's argument in chapter 5 depends would presumably have found his arguments sound, so here too those who accept that angelic figures, and perhaps others like Moses,[41] have been enabled by the indwelling of the divine name to perform unique tasks as God's envoy, would have found it difficult to deny the validity of John's argument: if Jesus has been commissioned by God in the way the Johannine

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[39] Apoc. Abr. 10:8ff.

[40] Ashton 1991:143. He cites at length Apoc. Abr. 10, where most of the parallels he is focusing on are found. As Ashton rightly notes, there is no question of direct dependence between the Fourth Gospel and Apoc. Abr.; rather, they represent two parallel phenomena which can in many ways mutually illuminate one another.

[41] On the possible connections between the divine name in John and Moses-motifs see especially Meeks 1967:290f,302,304. See too the Samaritan sources cited in Meeks 1967:236f; Fossum 1985:87-106. Possible knowledge of similar traditions among the rabbis are provided in Meeks 1967:193-195.

Christians claim, then there is no reason to regard the assertions made about Jesus by the Johannine Christians as blasphemous.[42]

The Evangelist has thus developed the traditional Christian association between Jesus' obedience to death on a cross, and his subsequent exaltation and being given the name above all other names. The one who does these things had *already* been indwelt by the Word, which is the Name, and it was this commissioning as God's agent which is *demonstrated* in his obedience to the Father, even to death on a cross. The exaltation then serves as a further demonstration, as the agent indwelt by the name returns with it to heaven. Through the use of the single phrase, 'lifting up', the Evangelist ties these various strands together into what appears to be a reasonably tidy system. However, in doing so he has once again altered the shape of the belief he inherited, the emphasis now being placed on the descent of the Name/Word from heaven and its return there, rather than on the exaltation of a human being.[43] This new emphasis makes the most sense if understood as part of the Evangelist's attempt to legitimate these traditional beliefs. In doing so, the Evangelist has not simply repeated the tradition, nor has he created ideas and arguments out of thin air. Rather, in seeking to defend his and his community's beliefs, he has in the process developed them, and other traditions, in a number of significant ways.

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[42] The Johannine Christians may have also found biblical support for their linking of the divine name 'I am' and the sending of an agent, based on Isa. 48:12-16, where there is an absolute 'I am' followed by a statement of having been sent by 'my Lord Yahweh', without any indication of a change of speaker (so Burkett 1991:156f).

[43] We shall have opportunity in ch.7 to consider the prologue, where a similar logic and emphasis appears to be at work. See also chs.10 and 13 below

One further point remains to be made. In its original context in Deutero-Isaiah, the 'I am (Yahweh)' declarations represent an affirmation of monotheism, of Israel's God as the only true God, against pagan polytheism and idolatry.[44] It may therefore seem ironic to some that John's christology, which has been regarded by some as an abandonment of Jewish monotheism and an assimilation to Gentile thought, makes use of such texts. However, it is unlikely that the Evangelist was unaware of such associations. Rather, if we are correct in the understanding which we have been putting forward of Johannine christology, then the use of 'I am' by the Johannine Jesus is to be taken as an affirmation that Israel's God is the only true God (a sentiment echoed in 17:3), that Johannine christology in no way represents a compromise with pagan polytheism or a rebellion against the unique honour and authority of the one God.[45] As Michaels rightly notes, the declaration 'I am' in its original context in Deutero-Isaiah "implies a radical and unqualified monotheism"; he further notes the important passages from the Hebrew scriptures in Isa. 47:8 and Zeph. 2:15, where foreign nations arrogantly claim "I am, and there is none beside me".[46] The conclusion which Michaels draws from this, quite correctly, it that "For anyone else to use this formula in the same way was blasphemy."[47] However, the Evangelist's portrayal of these words on the lips of Jesus differs radically from these passages from the Hebrew

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[44] Cf. Feuillet 1966:13,217.

[45] So rightly Harner 1970:57.

[46] Michaels 1984:154.

[47] Michaels 1984:154.

Bible referred to by Michaels: Jesus as 'I am' does not say 'there is no other', but rather affirms constantly that there is another upon whom he is wholly dependent, the one whose name 'I am' he bears and on whose behalf he can thus speak with full authority.[48] Nor should we see here a traditional 'second God' which was carried over from pre-exilic Israelite belief.[49] Whereas Ashton feels that interpreters would do well to be less concerned to defend the thesis that the Fourth Evangelist, "like all good Jews, was a die-hard monotheist",[50] others have reached the opposite conclusion that this thesis is the very one that the *Evangelist himself* is seeking to defend.[51] The Evangelist explicitly asserts his monotheistic beliefs in 17:3 (and also in 5:44), and if objectors questioned his fidelity to this foundation stone of Jewish belief, he would certainly have stressed the monotheistic character of his beliefs.[52] However, the issue does not appear to have been about whether the Johannine Christians were still monotheists, but about whether the one to whom they attributed various divine prerogatives and honours was God's appointed agent, or a rebel against God who sought to put himself in God's place. This discussion

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[48] Cf. e.g. 5:19-30; 8:28f; 12:48f; 14:10f. Harner 1970:57 writes that John consistently links his use of ἐγὼ εἰμι with the idea of Jesus' subordination and obedience to the Father, "and in this way he expresses his belief that Christian faith does not violate the integrity of monotheism in holding the Son to be one with the Father".

[49] *Contra* Ashton 1991:146, who too readily follows Barker's hypothesis (cf. Barker 1987; also the criticisms in Hurtado 1993:352-354).

[50] Ashton 1991:146.

[51] So also Harner 1970:54,57,60f; de Jonge 1996:236.

[52] Cf. Steenburg 1990:100f, who suggests that a similar reasoning may already be implicit in the Philippians hymn's use of Isaianic language. However, this seems to us *much* too early for this to have been an issue.

presupposes Jewish monotheism, but it does not appear that monotheism itself is the issue. The Fourth Evangelist works within the broad monotheism of first century Judaism and makes use of many areas of flexibility within that monotheism to present Jesus as God's legitimate agent, the one whom he sent, who carries out his will and bears his name, and who is thus worthy to be respected and obeyed even as one would respect and obey God himself.

The 'I am' statements attributed to God in Deutero-Isaiah were spoken by the prophet, in the first person, on God's behalf. In later Jewish-Christian thought, the one who has now come to rest decisively in and as Jesus is clearly considered to be the same one who previously spoke through the prophets.[53] As far as the Fourth Evangelist is concerned, the use of the divine name 'I am' by Jesus represents an appropriate expression of the Spirit or Word of God in and through the one with whom the Word/Spirit is now wholly at one: he can speak these words in a way that Deutero-Isaiah, indeed any of the prophets, could not. Nonetheless, presenting a human being as speaking these words not only on behalf of God and/or through the inspiration of God's Spirit, but as 'God incarnate', would eventually contribute to the extension of the boundaries of Christian monotheism and christology.

5.4 Summary

To sum up our findings in this section, then, we have shown that, in this part of the Gospel, John is dependent on earlier

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[53] Cf. e.g. Ps.-Clem. *Homilies* 3.20.13f; Gospel according to the Hebrews (Jerome, *On Isa.* 11:2).

traditions, concerning Jesus as the one who bears God's name and who carries out divine functions (such as giving, or being the source of, eternal life). Such claims made for Jesus had, by the time John wrote at least, come to be regarded by some as unacceptable and even blasphemous. The Fourth Evangelist seeks to show that there is nothing in these Christian beliefs which is not supported by Jewish tradition and scripture. In seeking to respond to the objections that have been raised, the Evangelist relates the idea of Jesus as the bearer of God's Name to the idea of Jesus as the one in whom God's Word dwelt. These two concepts had already been recognized as being closely related to one another in earlier Jewish writings. By exploiting this connection, the Evangelist could argue that Jesus was not a rebellious human being nor even a divinized human being, but the Word (or Name) become flesh. And because there was already some precedent for God's agent to bear the divine name, the Evangelist could tie the bearing of the divine name by Jesus into his portrayal of Jesus as God's agent. In so doing, he undermined certain possible objections, since if other figures, whether human or angels, could be thought of in these terms, then there was nothing blasphemous about similar claims being made for Jesus. In taking these steps, John was closely dependent on earlier tradition, and once again we find that the Evangelist was not simply creating arguments out of thin air: had he done so, his arguments would not have borne the weight they were required to.

Thus once again we can see how the steps which the Evangelist took developed christology in new directions. For John, as for those who connected the divine name and the idea

of agency with figures like Moses or Yaoel, these ideas allowed the ultimate and unique significance of a particular figure to be asserted. It is of course true that, by making such assertions in this way as part of a *defence* of his christology, the Evangelist created a portrait of Jesus which eventually raised questions that would trouble even the greatest of Christian minds for centuries. But once again we must stress that John does not appear to have addressed, much less to have answered, the questions which were the focus of the later christological controversies. This is first and foremost because the questions and issues which were to the fore in this later period had not yet been raised. It is also because he was concerned with other much more obvious and more pressing issues raised by 'the Jews'. Concerns relating to whether there were in fact two eternal powers in heaven had not been raised yet, and we cannot expect John to answer questions which no one had yet thought to ask. John's portrait of Jesus was firmly within the boundaries of Jewish monotheism as understood in his time. However, it is to a large extent John's use of these ideas in the context of controversy and in new and creative ways which (eventually) raised many of the issues that would confront Christian theology over the subsequent centuries. We may thus conclude that by presenting Jesus in a manner that raised these issues, the Fourth Evangelist determined more than any other New Testament author the directions which the development of christology would take and the issues with which the church would, sooner or later, be confronted.

CHAPTER 6

"YOU ARE GODS" - BUT WHO ARE 'YOU'? (JOHN 10:22-39)

6.1 Evidence of Legitimation

We may now turn our attention to John 10. In this part of the Fourth Gospel we have a clear example of an apologetic appeal to scripture in support of the christological claims made by the Johannine Jesus.[1] Thus Neyrey rightly classes vv34-36 and vv37-38 as apologies,[2] and Becker expresses a similar view in relation to the whole of 10:22-25,30-39.[3] There can be little doubt that the Fourth Evangelist is here responding to the objections brought by 'the Jews', and seeking thereby to defend or legitimate the beliefs which have come under fire.[4]

6.2 The Subject of the Conflict and its Relationship to Earlier Christological Beliefs

The issue which is raised explicitly in this chapter is that Jesus, a 'mere man', is 'making himself God', and thus committing 'blasphemy'. As Talbert has noted, many aspects of

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[1] Cf. Carson 1991:397; Painter 1991:306; Talbert 1992:169f. The argument proceeds in a way that at times resembles later Rabbinic forms of exegesis (cf. Brown 1966:lxx,405,409f; Painter 1991:306).

[2] Neyrey 1988:72-77. Similarly Neyrey 1989:653 entitles one section of his article, 'Psalm 82 as Apologetic Response'.

[3] Becker 1979:249f.

[4] Also worth mentioning is the observation of Haenchen 1984:2.52 that "Polemic and christology are closely interwoven in this passage".

this passage closely resemble the main elements of the dialogue with the Jews in John 5:[5]

(1) Jesus claims a functional unity with the Father. The Son does what the Father does (5:17,19-21; 10:25-30,37-38).[6]

(2) The Jews misunderstand this in terms of Jesus making himself, as Son, equal to or identical with the Father (5:18; 10:33).[7]

(3) As a direct consequence, 'the Jews' seek to kill Jesus (5:18; 10:31).

(4) An apologetic response is given, which appeals to scripture as a support for the claims and actions of Jesus (5:39-40,46-47; 10:34-35).

It thus seems justified to interpret this passage in light of John 5, as this may help us to answer some of the questions which will arise, and to alleviate some of the difficulties which we shall encounter.[8]

The reference to 'blasphemy' and the discussion of Jesus doing what God does, recall the tradition, found in the Synoptics, which lies behind John 5:1-18 (cf. Mark 2:1-12).[9]

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[5] Talbert 1992:169f.

[6] Most commentators agree that this is what ἕν means here, the neuter form indicating that 'united' is meant, rather than 'identical' or 'the same person'. Cf. MacGregor 1928:241; Brown 1966:403,407; Lindars 1972:370; Michaels 1984:187; Beasley-Murray 1987:174; Carson 1991:394f; Brodie 1993:376; Witherington 1995:191.

[7] Neyrey suggests that ἕν in 10:30 means, in context, something like 'equal to' or 'on a par with'. Lindars notes that the RSV renders ἕν as 'equal' in 1 Cor. 3:8. However, the Johannine Jesus nowhere else makes a direct claim to equality with God, but only to be God's agent, who by implication is (functionally) equal.

[8] So also rightly Beasley-Murray 1987:175.

[9] See above 4.2.1.

However, the accusation also recalls the Marcan trial narrative, where Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin for blasphemy (Mark 14:64).[10] As Lindars rightly points out, the direct question placed by 'the Jews' here concerning whether Jesus is the Christ also recalls the Synoptic trial narratives.[11] Jesus' response in both instances posits a special relationship between Jesus and God and claims for him an exalted status and role, which elicits an accusation of blasphemy and a decision to kill Jesus. [12]

It is not surprising to find the Evangelist using traditions from the trial narrative here, seeing as he has essentially replaced the traditional trial before the Jews (which follows Jesus' arrest in the Synoptics) with an 'extended trial narrative' that spans most or all of the public ministry.[13] Given the close links between the present passage and John 5, the tradition underlying it, and the Synoptic trial narrative, there is good reason to think that the issue of 'blasphemy' which the Fourth Evangelist is addressing here is

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[10] The exact nature of the 'blasphemy' here has been discussed by a number of recent studies. Some useful light appears to be shed by *b.* Sanh. 38b, where R. Akiba is rebuked for suggesting that the plural 'thrones' in Daniel indicates a second throne alongside God for the Davidic Messiah. The later rabbis found figures *seated* with God in heaven problematic, as the traditions concerning Metatron and Aher show (cf. 3 Enoch 16; 18:24). See further our discussion in ch. 3 above. At the very least, it is clear that at issue was the claim that Jesus would be exalted to heaven, an idea closely connected to the traditions which we surveyed in the previous section of this chapter of the thesis. Whether this would have been objectionable to John's opponents regardless of who the claim was made for is a question which unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this study - see further ch.8 below.

[11] Lindars 1972:368. See Mark 14:60f, and even more similar Luke 22:66f, as Smiga 1992:156 notes. See also Dodd 1963:91; Brown 1966:405f; Pancaro 1975:65; Beasley-Murray 1987:175; Brodie 1993:374.

[12] Cf. Pryor 1992:46. See also Sabbe 1991:447 who notes the similarity between the response of Jesus recorded in John 10:25 and Luke 22:67.

[13] Brown 1966:405; Pancaro 1975:7f,70f; Harvey 1976:17 (and *passim*); Sabbe 1991:445f; Lincoln 1994:6.

closely related to the charge of blasphemy which had been brought against Jesus even in earlier times. As in the Synoptics, and also in John 5, Jesus is felt to blaspheme because he is putting himself in the place of God, claiming to carry out functions which are thought to be divine prerogatives (in this passage the giving of eternal life is the divine prerogative explicitly mentioned, in 10:28).[14] The objectionable character of what the Johannine Jesus says may possibly have been enhanced by a misunderstanding: 'the Jews' may have understood Jesus' assertion, 'I and the Father are one', in the sense of 'I am the Father' or 'I and the Father are one and the same person', rather than as a reference to the unity of the Father and Son.[15] Nonetheless, the claim of the Son to carry out divine prerogatives is the key issue, and thus it is the idea that the Son and Father 'are one' in action that is in focus in the controversy described in this passage.[16] As in

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[14] Cf. Neyrey 1988:59,70f.

[15] Most commentators see the saying of the Johannine Jesus as one concerning the unity of action between Father and Son. This is confirmed by the use of the neuter ἕν and by vv37f.

[16] Neyrey 1988:69f still seems to pose the alternatives too sharply: John is not simply claiming a moral unity with God (something which all Jews aspired to), so he must be claiming that Jesus is 'on a par with' God (see 1988:78). However, the middle ground of agency once again seems to provide a better interpretation: Jesus bears equal authority to God and carries out divine activities, precisely as his agent who is subordinate to him. Cf. also Painter 1991:305, who suggests that John "proposed an ontological equality and a functional subordination". While John may have moved towards an ontological identification through his development of the Logos christology, John thinks as well (if not indeed primarily) in terms of a *functional* equality, the equality of the agent's authority with that of him who sent him. The relationship of the subordinate Son to the Logos who is God will be discussed in a later chapter. Nonetheless we are largely in agreement with his conclusion that "With the combination of functional and ontological sonship we find the distinctive Johannine christology, which is the result of a reinterpretation of the tradition" (1991:307).

We may also mention the textual variant in 10:33 which is attested in P^{66c}, which has the Jews accuse Jesus of being τὸν θεόν. Were this reading correct, the appeal to scripture would appear wholly inappropriate: whereas it makes sense as a response to the claim of a figure other than God to be called 'God' (although no such claim appears to have been made directly at any point in the preceding

John 5, the issue is the claim that Jesus does what God does, and, more specifically, whether it is justified and legitimate to make such a claim for Jesus.

The unity of Father and Son (which is such a crucial issue in the controversy portrayed in John 10) is not a Johannine creation, although it is clearly emphasized in John in a way that it is not in earlier writings. In Q, there is a unique mutual knowledge shared between Father and Son (Matt. 11:27 and parallel). Elsewhere in early Christian tradition they share a glory (Mark 8:38 and parallels) and a kingdom (Luke 22:29f; 23:42; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13). Paul calls the Gospel the 'Gospel of Christ' and 'Gospel of God' (e.g. Rom. 1:16; 15:16,19,29; 2 Cor. 9:13; 11:7). More directly relevant here is the gift from God of eternal life, which already in Paul's time is thought of as inseparable from and mediated by Christ (Rom. 5:17f,21; 8:2; cf. Col. 3:3f).[17] We should further note Raymond Brown's comment on the claims made for Jesus in John 10: "in itself this description remains purely functional and not too far removed from the Pauline formulation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (II Cor v 19)". [18] The imagery and concepts are more

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narrative), it would have no force as a response to a claim to be the only God, *the* God. Brown 1966:409 interprets John as in fact claiming that Jesus is "God with a capital 'G'" and suggests that John is ignoring the difference between the two different senses of 'god' because this was acceptable in the hermeneutics of the time. However, it is difficult to imagine an argument along these lines carrying much weight even in a first century context, and the reading found in all other MSS fits well with our interpretation of Johannine christology. At any rate, the fact that only one manuscript contains the reading makes it much easier to decide which reading is to be preferred. Even if the P^{66*} reading were original, it would presumably represent a Jewish misunderstanding of Jesus' words: 'I and the Father are one and the same' rather than 'I and the Father are a unity'.

[17] By the time Revelation was written God and the Lamb were thought to share worship and a throne.

[18] Brown 1966:408.

sharply focused in John, presumably because they have become a point of controversy, but nonetheless it seems clear that the issue of the unity of action between Jesus and the Father, including in the carrying out of divine prerogatives, is what is in mind here, and this relates to a wider stream of early Christian beliefs not limited to the Johannine circle.

There is one other possible indication that what the Johannine Jesus is here debating with 'the Jews' is not monotheism, but whether Jesus is a blasphemous glory-seeker or an appointed obedient agent exercising divine prerogatives on God's behalf and with his authority. I am referring to the setting of the dialogue: the feast of Dedication or Hanukkah. Some suggest that there is no connection between the dialogue and the feast which provides the setting for it: for example, Barrett writes, "it does not seem possible to detect any symbolical correspondence between the conduct of the feast and the ensuing discussion."[19] Others have proposed links with what were, in later times at least, the lectionary readings for the feast, which are said to have been passages relating to the imagery of the shepherd or to blasphemy.[20] However, an even more direct link may exist.[21] Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the temple after it was profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes. The books of Maccabees - which would have been familiar to John if he used the Septuagint, as it appears he did[22] - refer to

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[19] Barrett 1978:379; cf. also Schnackenburg 1980:305.

[20] Cf. Schnackenburg 1980:305; Talbert 1992:168, 170f; and the discussion of A. Guilding's views in Lindars 1972:366f; VanderKam 1990:207-210.

[21] I am indebted to Jerry Truex for drawing my attention to this possibility. Cf. VanderKam 1990:211-214; see also Moloney 1996:149f; Casey 1996:135.

[22] Cf. Schuchard 1992; Menken 1996. We have refrained from assuming that, as such, it would have had 'canonical' status for John; although it may

blasphemy more frequently than any other book in the OT or apocrypha ('blasphemy' occurs 3x in 1 Macc and 2x in 2 Macc; 'blaspheme' occurs 2x in 2 Macc; 'blasphemer' occurs 3x in 2 Macc and 'blasphemous' 2x in 2 Macc).[23] Thus over one third of all occurrences of 'blasphemy' and related terms are found in the books of the Maccabees. Further, in 2 Maccabees 9:12, which describes Antiochus on his deathbed, Antiochus is depicted as repenting and asserting that "no mortal should think that he is equal to God", a phrase which is not unlike the accusation here, "You, although you are a human being, make yourself God" (see also John 5:18, where it is equality to God that is specifically mentioned). It thus seems highly plausible to suggest that John does intend his readers to recall something of the overtones and significance of this feast and of the scriptural texts which recount its origins. We may take this as probable further confirmation of what was at issue: is Jesus making himself God or equal to God, as Antiochus Epiphanes and other blasphemers had done? Or was he, on the contrary, God's appointed agent, who obeyed God and as his agent bore the full authority of God himself? In view of the 'echoes of scripture' which we have detected in this passage, it seems likely that we are correct to see this as having been at the heart of the issue in this debate between the Johannine Jesus and 'the Jews'. The debate over whether Jesus was truly the Messiah, or a blasphemous false messianic pretender, is not distinctively

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well have, the applicability of the concept of 'canon' to discussions of first century Judaism is at present much-debated.

[23] 'Blaspheme' in various forms occurs a total of 16 other times in the whole of the OT and apocrypha. 'Blasphemer' occurs 2 other times and 'blasphemy' occurs 4 other times.

Johannine, but arose prior to John. This encourages us to look for ways in which John is seeking to legitimate his belief that Jesus is the Messiah and, as such, legitimately carries out actions on God's behalf as his appointed agent.

6.3 The Johannine Response

If it is relatively clear that the Evangelist was engaged in a debate concerning christology and was seeking to defend his beliefs, it is in contrast surprisingly difficult to reach firm conclusions about exactly what the point is that the Evangelist wished to make in his defence, and how he was seeking to make it. It is clear that an appeal is being made to scripture, but the precise force which the argument is likely to have had has been the subject of considerable debate.

The key to understanding John's apologetic argument here is in his use of Ps. 82:6. There are a number of questions which need to be answered. For example, who are those who are called 'gods' to whom the Word of God came, and what is Jesus' relationship to them? And is Jesus arguing *a minori ad maius* (from the lesser to the greater) or *a maiori ad minus* (from the greater to the lesser)? That is to say, is Jesus arguing 'If others can be called 'gods', how much more can I' or 'If others can be called 'gods', then what is wrong with my lesser claim to be God's son'?

Thus one major question which arises immediately is the significance of the change from 'gods' to 'son of God' in 10:35f. In the preceding narrative, Jesus has spoken of himself and God in terms of Son and Father; there has been no explicit claim to the designation 'God'. Brown and Neyrey have pointed

out that the move from 'gods' to 'Son of God' does not necessarily represent a lessening of the claim being made for Jesus: in Psalm 82, which John quotes, 'gods' and 'sons of the Most High' are equivalent, as is shown by their use in synonymous parallelism to one another.[24] Therefore we must determine who the Evangelist understood 'those to whom the word of God came', those referred to in the Psalm as 'gods' and as 'sons of the Most High', to be, in order to clarify in what sense Jesus is claiming to be 'Son of God' or 'God'.

Although it is worth noting that cases have been made for interpreting the reference as being to (a) angels; (b) judges; (c) prophets or (d) Israel at Sinai, only the last of these - Israel at Sinai - can be in mind in John, in view of the reference to the word of God having come to certain individuals,[25] and also in view of the original context of the verse John cites, which emphasizes that those who are called 'gods' will nonetheless "die like men."[26] Angels and judges are

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[24] Brown 1966:409; Neyrey 1988:73.

[25] So rightly Beasley-Murray 1987:176f; Carson 1991:397. Cf. also Phillips 1989:410f n.13. Loader 1992:163 suggests that this interpretation would be a long way from what the author usually means by θεός in reference to Jesus, which seems an odd remark in view of the fact that the only other clear reference to Jesus as God is found in 20:28! The text in 1:18 is disputed (see Manns 1991:22; Ehrman 1992:78-82), and 1:1 refers to the pre-existent Logos, which is relevant for the status of Jesus but is not an example of the use of θεός in reference to the human being Jesus. See also our discussion of the prologue in ch. 7 below.

[26] Recently Menken has suggested that the Evangelist had the prophets in view, since these were the figures to whom it is most frequently said that 'the word of God came' (Menken 1997:376; see also Boismard 1974). In order to make his case plausible, Menken must posit that the Evangelist ignores the original context, intending that the reader think only of the portion of the Jewish scriptures which is cited and no more (Menken 1997:393), since the prophets would not be an obvious group to which to apply the words, "Yet you shall die like men." The evidence which Menken gathers refers to agents appointed by God, which includes prophets but is a much broader category, including e.g. the judges, Adam as God's viceroy and probably even Israel at Sinai. This evidence is important, and if John's citation has in mind agency in general rather than Israel at Sinai in particular, most of the points made in this section will still retain their validity. His points about ascent to heaven as part of the appointing of an agent are interesting in connection with our discussion in ch.10. (The argument of Boismard

not associated with the idea of the coming of the word of God, and the prophetic figures in the Jewish scriptures were not singled out by God for judgment:[27] only of Israel at Sinai can both be said. This is also the interpretation which occurs most frequently in the Rabbinic literature.[28] Neyrey has greatly illuminated the passage by seeking to demonstrate that, rather than having chosen this text in order to argue, in a very unsophisticated and *ad hoc* way, that 'others are called 'gods' so why not Jesus?', the Evangelist probably chose it with its specific history of interpretation in mind.

In the most common form of Rabbinic interpretation of Ps. 82:6, the Israelites are addressed as 'gods' at Sinai because, when Torah was given, they became deathless, the Angel of Death being restrained from affecting them any longer. But when they sinned, they lost this privilege, with the result that they shall 'die like men'. This was sometimes connected with the similar imagery applied to Adam in Genesis 3: Adam could have had access to immortality, but through his disobedience to the commandment, death gained power over him. Neyrey suggests that it is because Jesus is holy or consecrated, and has power over death, that this text is applied to him.[29] In our view, there are even more fundamental issues in the interpretation of the

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(1974:161) that 'word' in the singular never refers to Torah is simply without foundation - cf. e.g. the frequent parallelism between 'word' and 'law' throughout Ps. 119).

[27] Of course, the false prophets are condemned, but precisely because they proclaimed their own words and had not received the Word of God or been sent by him (cf. e.g. Jer. 1:14; 23:25-38; Ezek. 13:17).

[28] Barrett 1978:384. Cf. the texts conveniently collected and cited in Neyrey 1989:655-658. Also Wedderburn 1978:414f; Hanson 1991:144f. Scroggs 1966:53 acknowledges the existence of this typology but seeks to play it down, presumably because he refuses to find allusions to the story of Adam in Rom.1 and 7.

[29] Neyrey 1989:659-663.

Psalm which the Evangelist has in mind and to which he is appealing.

Before we can consider them, however, we must cautiously consider what evidence there is, if any, that the interpretation of this Psalm found in Rabbinic exegesis could have its origins early enough for John to have known it. The most important piece of evidence is John's own testimony: in spite of the fact that the most obvious reference in the Psalm is to rulers (or possibly to heavenly beings), John seems clearly to identify those referred to in the Psalm as Israel at Sinai, 'those to whom the Word of God came'. The fact that John chooses this precise phrase, 'those to whom the Word of God came', is also significant, since this was precisely the point of contact between the Adam and Sinai narratives exploited by the later exegetes: both received the word or commandment of God.

That earlier Jewish authors had already drawn parallels of this sort between the Sinai and Eden narratives seems clear, even if it had not been formulated in the exact same terms. A number of early Jewish sources draw parallels between Adam and Israel with respect to their obedience (or otherwise) to God's law.[30] In fact, a good case can be made for some authors of the Hebrew Bible having intended such parallels to be drawn. In a number of places in the Jewish scriptures the exodus is thought of as a new creation, and the fulfillment of the promise to

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[30] So e.g. Ps.-Philo 13:8-10; Jub. 2:23; 3:31; Ben Sira 17; cf. Wisd. 10:1f, 16. See also the slightly later but possibly pre-Johannine 4 Ezra 3:4-22; 7:72,116-131. On points of similarity and contrast in 2 Bar.17f cf. Levison 1988:133f. Levison 1988 rightly stresses the diversity of early Jewish portraits of Adam, and we have no desire to deny this. The point which we are making here is simply that the ideas which we have suggested are presupposed by John's discussion can be traced back early enough to make John's knowledge of them plausible.

Abraham is portrayed as the reversal of Adam's sin; this is followed by the giving of a commandment, which in turn is followed by disobedience and punishment/curse which involves exclusion from the land.[31]

Early Christian writings prior to John also bear witness to similar ideas. At several points in Paul's letters, the argument makes sense only on the assumption that the stories of Adam receiving the commandment and Israel receiving Torah were already regarded as in some way parallel and comparable to one another.[32] And in the Synoptic temptation narratives, Jesus is portrayed as having obeyed where Adam and/or Israel disobeyed, and as being himself at once the true Adam and the true Israel.[33] It might be suggested that John was the first to relate such ideas to Psalm 82:6 - this is possible, but seems unlikely in view of the fact that this exegesis is so widely accepted in Rabbinic sources, as it seems highly improbable that the later rabbis borrowed these ideas from John. But even if John *was* the first to relate these parallels between Adam and Israel to Psalm 82:6, at the very least the conceptual basis for John's exegesis seems to have been well established by the time he wrote.

In the pre-Johannine (and probably pre-Pauline) passage Phil. 2:6-11, Jesus is portrayed as having been exalted to heaven and having received the divine name in a way that, at a later stage, 'the Jews' would find objectionable. John 8

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[31] Cf. Wright 1991:24f for the relevant passages and their interpretation.

[32] Cf. Wedderburn 1978:413-419; Dunn 1988:72f; Hooker 1990:73-87 on Rom.1:23; and Wedderburn 1978:419-422; Dunn 1988:378f on Rom.7:7.

[33] Cf. Dunn 1970:29-31; Hill 1972:101.

appears to show awareness of the ideas found in the Philippians hymn and in other early Christian writings: Jesus as the one who bears the divine name in connection with his obedience to the Father, his death and his exaltation.[34] In view of the points made by Neyrey, it is perhaps significant that this understanding of the exalted status of Christ was part of the presentation of him in terms of 'Adam christology', i.e. as having obeyed as Adam should have and having been rewarded accordingly.[35] A fundamental connection thus appears to exist between the traditional interpretation within Judaism of Psalm 82 in terms of Israel/Adam typology, and aspects of the christology which portrayed Jesus as exalted to heaven, serving as God's vice-regent and bearing his name, which were important issues in the Johannine conflict with 'the Jews'. This is unlikely to be a coincidence, and we must reflect on what the implications of John's appeal to this Psalm would have been for those aware of these traditional associations and interpretation.[36]

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[34] See our discussion of John 8 in the previous chapter.

[35] Cf. Dunn 1989:114-123; Wright 1991a:90-96. There is explicit evidence from Jewish and Christian authors (much of which is from a later date, but some of which dates from the first century) for the idea that Adam was appointed as God's viceroy and as 'god' over the earth, and/or that had he remained faithful and obedient, would have been exalted and ruled (or continued to rule) as 'god' (that is, as God's agent) over the earth. See the widespread Jewish traditions on this subject, e.g. in Philo, *Op. Mund.* 148; *Life of Adam and Eve* 13-15; *b.* Hag. 12a; *b.* Sanh. 38b; Yalkut Shimeoni I §120. See also the other passages mentioned above (2.2.7), and in Scroggs 1966:25-29; Steenburg 1990:96-98. Cf. also the various parallels cited by Fossum 1985:271-277, and also Theophilus, *Ad Autolycus* 2.24 (and the discussion thereof in Grant 1986:132).

[36] It should perhaps also be noted that this is not necessarily the only place in John where the Evangelist shows an interest in and awareness of Jewish exegesis of the Adam narratives. Borgen 1987a:90-92 connects the light/darkness imagery with Rabbinic interpretations of Adam's fall. The prologue has also been suggested to reflect the 'Sinai myth' presupposed in Rabbinic interpretation of Ps.82 (Ackerman 1966:188). While Ackerman uses much later works with insufficient care, Borgen points to 2 Bar. 17f as evidence from around John's time of the association of light/darkness imagery with Adam. See also Beasley-Murray 1987:177, who suggests that John reflects the Christian

As we have already seen, it appears quite certain that those whom John referred to as 'those to whom the word of God came' were the Israelites at Sinai and Adam. They had received God's commandment, and were set apart for him, to serve and obey him faithfully, and in so doing to act as his vice-regent(s), as 'god(s)' with dominion over the earth, to rule it on God's behalf.[37] These figures had been referred to as 'gods' in scripture, and although they had failed in their appointed tasks and so lost this status, the general principle remains valid. It would seem that the Evangelist is arguing that those who receive God's commission to serve as his agents and/or vice-regents are rightly called by the name of him who sent or appointed them.[38]

These considerations appear to shed light on the question of the meaning of 'gods' and 'Son of God' here. Brown and Neyrey are correct: the two designations are indeed parallel to one another. The designation of the agent or viceroy of God as 'god', and the special relationship of sonship, go hand in hand. In the Jewish scriptures and subsequent traditions, both Israel, and (somewhat less frequently) Adam, are referred to as God's son. This further elucidates the argument which John is putting forward: sonship and agency are inextricably

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tradition of Jesus as the Son of God who represents Israel, the nation called to be God's son(s). See too Manns 1991:42-50; Hanson 1991:280; Carson 1991:398.

[37] On the covenant with Abraham and his descendants as a restoration of the original state of Adam, cf. Wright 1991.

[38] In a similar vein Thompson 1992:377 makes the interesting suggestion that the use of 'God' in reference to Jesus/the Logos derives from the idea of agency, stressing that the agent rightly exercises divine prerogatives. See also Painter 1991:306; Loader 1992:157f, 160. See too the texts from the Jewish scriptures cited in Phillips 1989:409 n.13.

interconnected. [39] To claim to be God's son - and at the same time to rule on his behalf, in complete unity with him, as his viceroy and agent, doing his work and wielding his authority, perhaps even being called by God's own name - is to be regarded as legitimate on the basis of the fact that the very same imagery is applied to Adam and Israel in Jewish tradition. There is thus nothing blasphemous about making similar claims for Jesus. In addition, in view of the polemical thrust found elsewhere in John against those who boast of their privileges because of their descent from Abraham or participation in the people of Israel,[40] the implicit message may be: if God called Israel as a whole 'gods', even though they ultimately failed (and probably John would want to say *still fail*) to obey,[41] how much more worthy is Jesus, who always does what pleases his Father (cf. 8:29). As in John 5 and 8, the Evangelist is once again appealing to the concept of agency in order to defend the exalted status and functions attributed to Jesus by Christians.[42]

As with the other sections of John that we have considered thus far in this section of the thesis (that is, John 5 and 8), here too our interpretation is not complete until we allow the light of the prologue to shine here fully. Jesus is not simply a human agent, appointed, because of his

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[39] See our discussion of sonship and agency in John 5 in ch.4 above.

[40] Cf. e.g. 1:11-13; 8:33-40.

[41] As Michaels 1984:188 notes, the context of Ps.82 as a whole emphasizes the failure and negative aspects of those who were called 'gods' in this way.

[42] Brodie 1993:378 rightly notes that agency is implied by the reference in 10:36 to consecration and sending. See also Perkins 1989:969.

obedience, to fulfill the role Adam forfeited. Rather, he is the one who was always with the Father, whom he consecrated and sent into the world: the Logos. The implication of this in the present context is grasped well by Brown: Jesus "is not a man who makes himself God; he is the Word of God who has become man."[43] The use of λόγος in v35 may be an intentional allusion to the prologue, with a contrast being made between 'those to whom the Word of God came' and the one *as whom* the Word of God came.[44] It seems reasonably likely that an attentive reader would have recalled in this discussion of the designation θεός the affirmation that θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος in 1:1, and the words ὁ λόγος... ἐγένετο would likewise have recalled the phrase ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο in 1:14. The description of Jesus here as the one who pre-existed, was consecrated and was sent into the world must have the Logos in mind, making such a contrast even more likely to have been intended by the Evangelist. Thus here, as elsewhere, the argument is moved onto a higher plane through being brought into connection with the Evangelist's Logos christology: the argument is not simply that if other human beings have occupied this role or status then so can Jesus, but rather that if human beings such as Adam and the Israelites have been deemed worthy of this honour in their role as God's agents, then how much more worthy is the Word of God, and thus the Word-become-flesh, Jesus Christ, who is God's agent in the fullest sense, his heavenly agent become his earthly agent. In

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[43] Brown 1966:408.

[44] So e.g. Cadman 1969:120; Hanson 1991:146-149. See also Barrett 1978:385; Phillips 1989:416.

terms of the development of earlier christology, we may put it sharply in the following terms: the Evangelist makes use of, appeals to and develops earlier Wisdom and agency christology categories in order to defend an (equally early) Adam/exaltation christology, and the related idea that Jesus carries out actions which were the prerogatives of God himself.

6.4 Summary

To sum up, the Evangelist in this section shows an awareness of earlier Christian ideas, which had - at least by the time of the writing of the Fourth Gospel, but in all probability even earlier - become controversial: this can be seen from the echoes of both John 5 (and the traditions and issues underlying it) and of the Synoptic trial tradition. It is also hinted at in the implicit connections with Adam christology, with which the issues debated in John 8 (such as the exaltation of Jesus and his bearing the name of God) were connected from a very early stage. The Evangelist seeks to counter the objections which had been raised through one of the most basic forms of legitimation: an appeal to the scriptures which were authoritative to both sides in the debate. The argument is not simply an *ad hoc* one, but evidences awareness of an interpretation of Psalm 82:6 which appears to have been current in at least some Jewish circles. One whom God set apart to be his viceroy and to rule over the earth could rightly be called both 'God' and 'son of God', sharing in an intimate relationship of obedience to God and yet wielding an authority like God's over the earth. If this was true of others who ultimately proved unworthy of this calling, how much more was

it true of the Word-become-flesh, Jesus, who always obeyed and obeys his Father.

We may outline our interpretation of John 10:22-39 thus:

vv22-23: The setting of the debate is the Feast of Dedication. If, as elsewhere in John, there is a link between the discourse and the Jewish religious institution against the backdrop of which it takes place, then the link here may be the downfall of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was remembered as having considered himself 'equal to God'.

v24: Jesus is asked to confess plainly whether he is the Christ. Jesus is on trial, and the Jews wish to convict him. As in the Synoptics, they do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, but wish for him to make an explicit claim on the basis of which they may convict him.

vv25-30: Jesus claims that the miracles which he does in the Father's name demonstrate who he is (God's appointed agent, the Messiah). Jesus is one with the Father in action, even giving eternal life.

vv31-33: The Jews decide to stone Jesus for blasphemy: they do not accept his claims, and thus find his assertion that he is 'one' with God and does what God does blasphemous and insulting to God. He is a mere man, yet he *makes himself* God.

vv34-36: Jesus defends the legitimacy of the agent of God being called 'Son of God' and even 'God' on the basis of Scripture. If this applies to earthly agents (Adam and Israel) who ultimately failed to obey God, how much more does it apply to God's heavenly agent, now become flesh, who always obeys God? If the scriptures show something to be legitimate, there can be no denying it.

vv37-38: The preceding argument depends on Jesus actually being the agent of God, and thus John reiterates once again that the miracles which he performs confirm his claim.

vv39-42: The opponents reject him in spite of these arguments, but many others believe.

John's argument depends on the scriptures and traditions of Judaism (and Christianity). Yet, as in the other parts of John, significant steps are being taken in certain directions. The emphasis is once again moved away from Jesus fulfilling divine functions as an exalted human being, and placed on the worthiness of him to do so as the pre-existent Word become flesh. The use of Wisdom motifs and imagery to describe Jesus was already part of the Christian tradition.[45] John, by identifying Jesus and the Word or Wisdom even more closely, was able to legitimate the claims made for Jesus: if a human agent of God is worthy of honour and to act on God's behalf, how much

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[45] See our discussion of this point above 2.2.1.

more his supreme heavenly agent, the Word. Dunn has pointed out that there is a very fine (and perhaps somewhat fuzzy) line between total inspiration and incarnation.[46] If Dunn is correct, John may well have been the first to cross that line; and, if so, his reason for doing so was very likely his need to draw out more fully the implications of the traditions which he inherited, in order to defend and legitimate the exalted status and functions which Christians attributed to Jesus.

Another extremely noteworthy development seen in John 10 is the defence of Jesus not only bearing the authority of God but even being called 'God'. The Fourth Evangelist does apply the designation 'God' to the risen Jesus in 20:28,[47] but shows a great reticence - which his predecessors shared, to such an extent that it is not clear whether they intended to refer to Jesus as 'God' at all. In the period after John we notice a remarkable change: in Ignatius we already find a tendency to speak much more freely of Jesus as 'God', and in later times even the Jewish-Christian Pseudo-Clementine literature defends this practice.[48] This is very likely a result of the fact that in John we find a scriptural support and basis being provided for this Christian practice of calling Jesus 'God'. Thus, in spite of his own restraint and reticence in referring to the

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[46] Dunn 1992b:398f.

[47] And perhaps in 1:18, although this is debatable.

[48] As we have noted elsewhere (McGrath 1996:6), the argument in this chapter can be fruitfully compared with that found in the Jewish-Christian Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 2.42, where the argument is that those who are rulers or agents on God's behalf can be called 'God'. Peter is depicted there as arguing: "Therefore the name *God* is applied in three ways: either because he to whom it is given is truly God, or because he is the servant of him who is truly; and for the honour of the sender, that his authority may be full, he that is sent is called by the name of him who sends..."

human being Jesus as 'God', by providing an argument which sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of using this language in reference to Jesus, the Evangelist apparently encouraged its wider usage, and this usage helped shape the course which later christological development followed and the conclusions which it reached. And so, we see in John 10, as in the other passages we have considered thus far, evidence of the role legitimation played in the development of Johannine christology.

CHAPTER 7

IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER (JOHN 1:1-18)

7.1 Evidence of Legitimation

This part of our thesis would not be complete without a consideration of the prologue, since, as we have already stressed, the Evangelist intended the whole of his work to be read in light of it.[1] Nonetheless we have left it until last not due to any literary considerations,[2] but because the evidence of *controversy* over christology is much less explicit here than in the other passages we have considered.

Nonetheless, a number of recent studies have emphasized that the conflicts and issues which are reflected in the rest of the Gospel are also present in the prologue. For example, as Kysar notes, there is a light-darkness dualism in the prologue, symbolic of the acceptance and rejection of the Logos, which also runs throughout the Gospel and which is found in several of the conflict passages we have singled out for consideration in this thesis.[3] Closely connected with this is the prologue's polemical tone, emphasizing the Logos as the *true* (ἀληθινόν) light, and Jesus as the *unique* (μονογενὴς) Son of God. This, Kysar asserts confidently, "reflect[s]...a

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[1] Barrett 1978:156; Beasley-Murray 1987:5; Hartman 1987:96f; Carson 1991:111; Dunn 1991a:313,317; Pryor 1992:7; Witherington 1995:54. See also above, pp.130,155.

[2] This is not to ignore the difficult questions of whether the prologue is based on an earlier hymnic work, or of whether the Gospel ever circulated without the prologue. Nonetheless, the person(s) who put the Gospel in its present form clearly intended the whole work to be read through the 'lens' of the prologue.

[3] Kysar 1978:354. See also Creech 1984:206-217; Carter 1990:38f.

community under attack."[4] This polemic Kysar connects with the issue of the revelations brought by Jesus and Moses.[5] Carter, however, also seeks to relate the prologue to the conflict we have been considering in this chapter, that of the relationship between Jesus and God.[6] This is a conclusion which we have already hinted at, and which we shall seek to demonstrate below. As the prologue shows indications of containing the same themes, and being concerned with the same issues, as the rest of the Gospel, it seems likely that here too we may find evidence of the Evangelist's use of traditional motifs and imagery for the purpose of legitimation.[7]

7.2 A Point of Controversy and its Relation to Earlier Christology

Although the prologue is often regarded as the peak or culmination of Johannine christological development, it is, on the contrary, by no means clear that the prologue as a whole represents a very late, or even a very distinctively Johannine, development. The Johannine prologue resembles in numerous ways other early Christian expressions of wisdom christology.[8] These earlier Christian wisdom ideas were

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[4] Kysar 1978:355.

[5] Kysar 1978:358-361. This topic will be treated further below, ch.9.

[6] Carter 1990:48 (see also pp.38,41).

[7] See too McGrath 1997c, where we have sought to read the whole prologue in light of our model of legitimation. On the close thematic relationship between the prologue and the rest of the Gospel see also Robinson 1984a; Carson 1991:111,135; Harris 1994. See too Dunn 1991a:313 n.78.

[8] So e.g. Boismard 1953:23; Kysar 1978:348-351. See also Carson 1991:135f; McGrath 1998a:43-47. See further above 2.2.1.

themselves derived from modes of thought and expression which were fundamentally Jewish. In their Christian form, such ideas probably took shape in the context of reflection on the relationship between Jesus and God's earlier self-manifestation in the Torah.[9]

The earliest Christian hymns, including those that make use of wisdom language, were hymns about or to the *exalted* Christ.[10] (This is significant for our purposes, since the claim that Christ had been exalted to heaven and was now seated at God's right hand seems to have been one of the aspects of earliest Christian belief that provoked objections and accusations of blasphemy.[11]) The prologue to John's Gospel is sometimes regarded as an exception, since some scholars have suggested that the whole focus here is on the pre-existent Logos and the incarnation, with no mention of or interest in the exaltation of Christ.[12] This conclusion we believe to be mistaken for several reasons.

First, the structure of the hymn seems to imply that the place of Jesus with the Father in v18 refers to the ascended Christ. Most scholars agree that vv1-2 and v18 parallel one another,[13] and seeing as we have the incarnation mentioned in

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[9] See e.g. W. D. Davies 1955:147-176; N. T. Wright 1991b:118. Wright also suggests that Colossians is using Wisdom imagery to address the issue of monotheism. However, there is no evidence that anyone regarded this author's christology as in conflict with monotheism as understood in the first century. See further McGrath 1998a:44-47, and also ch. 3 above.

[10] Those that we have either refer to Christ in his present exalted state, or end with the exaltation. See further Hengel 1983:85f; also Beasley-Murray 1980, *passim*.

[11] Cf. Mark 14:62-64. See further our discussion in ch. 3 above.

[12] So e.g. Schnackenburg 1968:224 (hesitantly); Kysar 1978:352; Beasley-Murray 1987:4; Witherington 1995:54.

[13] So e.g. Brown 1966:5,36; 1994:188; Painter 1984:470; Cholin 1989:194-196; Habermann 1990:400; Carson 1991:135; Manns 1991:34; Loader

between, the ending very likely refers to the Logos-become-flesh, Jesus Christ, having returned to heaven. If those scholars who find an inverted parallelism in the prologue are correct,[14] this would lend even further support to our argument, although it does not depend on it. Also noteworthy is that the reference in v18 is to the μονογενὴς, which v14 makes clear refers to the Logos-become-flesh.[15]

Beasley-Murray, on the other hand, finds neither descent nor ascent in the prologue, and asserts that the Logos does not descend even for incarnation.[16] The main reason that he reads the prologue in this way is his explicit refusal to allow the later references to descent and ascent throughout the Gospel to illuminate the meaning of the prologue. This is a questionable methodology, since the readers of the Gospel would, for the most part at least, have been members of Johannine church(es), who would be familiar with many of the narratives recorded therein before ever setting eyes on the

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1992:158f; Harris 1994:115 n.2. Borgen 1987:83 also regards the beginning and end of the prologue as parallel, and the structure he posits is chiastic even though it differs from that proposed by the scholars mentioned in the note which follows; those mentioned there also find such a parallelism as part of the prologue's overall structure.

[14] So e.g. Boismard 1953:106f; 1988:98; Culpepper 1980:16; Renner 1982:190-197; Lamarche 1986:43-45; Harrington 1990:18; Talbert 1992:66f; Pryor 1990:201f; 1992:9f; Stibbe 1993:30 (citing Staley); McGrath 1997c:101-103. The fact that the two subsequent sections also appear to be chiastically structured gives further support to this view (cf. Danna 1997:29f). Cholin (1989:195) cites H. Gese and M. Theobald as also proposing similar structures for the prologue. Pryor 1990:201 writes, "It may be going too far to speak of a consensus but there has certainly been a marked willingness in recent times to consider the finished product of the prologue as having an essentially chiastic structure".

[15] See Cadman 1969:17, who argues that sonship-terminology is reserved for the *incarnate* Logos. See too Brown 1991:89; Smith 1995:101. We shall discuss this point further below, 15.3.

[16] Beasley-Murray 1987:4.

written Gospel.[17] Beasley-Murray also does insufficient justice to the possibility that the event described here in terms of the Word becoming flesh would have been understood to be the same as that described in 1:32 in terms of the Spirit *descending* and remaining on him.[18] His argument that v18 cannot have the exalted Christ primarily in mind, because there is a reference to the revelation brought by the incarnate one while in the world, ignores the fact that the aorist tense ἐξηγήσατο, used here in conjunction with the present continuous tense ὁ ὢν, may legitimately be translated "the one who is (*now*) in the bosom of the Father, he is the one who has (previously, prior to his ascension) made God known" (so most English versions). We thus find more convincing the view of the majority of scholars, who see in John a parallelism between the beginning and end of the prologue; and this seems to imply that there is a move from heaven, to earth for the incarnation, and back to heaven again. This lends support to our suggestion that the prologue ends with the exalted Christ in heaven alongside God, and will also shed light on the way John is interacting with this idea in the context of his work of legitimation.

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[17] The Evangelist frequently assumes that the reader will recognize characters which have not been introduced and will be familiar with events not yet narrated (see also Danna 1997:63). Of course, it is correct first and foremost to read the Gospel in light of the prologue, rather than vice versa, but this need not mean that a less clear aspect of the prologue cannot legitimately be illuminated by motifs and emphases which are found throughout the remainder of the Gospel.

[18] Cf. Fuller 1976; Watson 1987; Theobald 1988:408-418; Talbert 1993; McGrath 1996:4f; 1997c:117f. See also our discussion above 2.2.1 and below, p.171. The imagery of the Spirit like a dove may also allude to the imagery of Genesis 1:2, connecting this event witnessed by the Baptist to the other imagery from Genesis 1 found in the prologue (cf. Carmichael 1996:44f).

Second, the idiom of being 'in the bosom' (εἰς τὸν κόλπον) of another person seems to refer to the position of *being seated next to* that person, especially if the other examples of the idiom in the New Testament are anything to go by.[19] Many scholars have noted that the same idiom is used in John 1:18 and 13:23, but they have generally tended to read its use in reference to Jesus and the beloved disciple in 13:23 in light of its use in 1:18, suggesting that the main point of the idiom's use here is that the beloved disciple's intimate relationship with Jesus is akin to Jesus' relationship to the Father.[20] However, the meaning of the idiom is clearer in its use in the non-poetic contexts of John 13:23 and Luke 16:23, and it is more advisable to begin with these latter texts, which may then be used to elucidate 1:18.[21] Sanders does just that, and therefore writes, "By describing the only begotten as **in the bosom of the Father** John indicates their intimate relationship, as of friends reclining together at a banquet."[22] Marsh makes a similar point, and writes of the phrase used in 1:18, "This is the position given at a meal to the specially intimate guest."[23] These scholars have made an important insight into the understanding of this text, the full implications of which for our study we will attempt to draw out below. Before proceeding, however, we should stress that

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[19] John 13:23; Luke 16:23.

[20] So e.g. MacGregor 1928:21; Lindars 1972:99; Beasley-Murray 1987:238.

[21] *Contra* Bernard 1928:32, who considers that the use at 13:23 "does not...help us".

[22] Sanders 1968:86.

[23] Marsh 1968:112.

there is no reason to think that this idiom referred exclusively to being seated alongside someone else *at a meal*. The fact that it is specified in John 13:23 that the beloved disciple was *reclining* (ἀνακείμενος) 'alongside Jesus' (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ του Ιησου) probably suggests that the idiom on its own simply means 'alongside', and does not *exclusively* refer to the position of *reclining at table*. A useful comparison may perhaps be made to the English idiom 'abreast'.[24]

John's reference to Jesus 'alongside' the Father would probably have conjured up in the minds of his hearers the image of the exalted Christ seated at God's right hand, in the place of honour alongside him in heaven. This appears to be how several scholars interpret the idiom, although they do not explicitly discuss it. For example, Eltester, in commenting on 1:18, writes that "Nur der ‚eingeborene Sohn' ist zur Rechten des Vaters",[25] and Brown renders the idiom as "at the Father's side."[26] Taken together, (a) the evidence that Christian hymns consistently focus on or conclude with the exalted Christ, (b) the structure and parallelism of the prologue, and (c) the

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[24] The EDNT article on κόλπος summarizes the meaning of the idiom ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ as "a place of honor". See also the papyrus fragment Preisigke Sammelbuch, 2034, and also *Const. Ap.* 8.41.2, both of which contain the phrase 'in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob', and which must thus mean something like 'alongside', since it goes without saying that one cannot be leaning one's head on the breast of all three figures simultaneously (these texts and other relevant ones are available in Meyer 1965.

[25] Eltester 1964:133.

[26] Brown 1966:4. He also refers to 'others' who find a reference to the ascension here, but unfortunately without any explicit citation (1966:17). MacGregor 1928:21 mentions the ascension in this context but makes nothing further of it. Strachan recognizes that the phrase means something like 'sitting next to' in its other occurrences, but fails to apply this insight to John 1:18 (1941:108f). Hay 1973:94 notes this phrase in John 1:18 as a possible allusion to Ps.110:1b with its reference to sitting *at the right hand*.

language and idioms used, all suggest that the prologue is best understood as ending with the exalted Christ seated alongside the Father in heaven, a concept which some had found blasphemous even in earlier times.[27]

7.3 The Johannine Response

7.3.1 The Wisdom that Sits beside God's Throne

When considered in light of the points made in the previous section, the prologue takes on a new significance: It can be understood not only as a preliminary chorus, setting forth the themes of the Gospel and providing the author's perspective as a guide to understanding what follows, but also as a defence of the legitimacy of the Johannine understanding of Christ. The parallelism between the beginning and end of the prologue can be understood as an attempt to legitimate the place occupied by the exalted Christ. Jesus can occupy the highest place alongside God because he is the Word become flesh. God's Word or Wisdom had always rightfully occupied this place, as can be seen from passages such as Wisd. 9:4, which speaks of Wisdom sitting beside God's throne.[28] The Evangelist appeals to these traditions as a way of showing the legitimacy of this belief which he and his community hold dear.[29] We shall now

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[27] Cf. the discussions above of the charge of blasphemy in the Synoptic trial narratives, which seems to be a response to Jesus' claim that he will be 'seated at the right hand of God' as the Son of Man (esp. ch.3 above).

[28] Cf. Wisd. 9:10. See too Philo, *De Fug.* 19 §101, which seems to indicate that the Logos sits alongside God in his throne-chariot (so Evans 1995:420).

[29] Carter suggests that "Wisdom is...invoked to uphold monotheism" (1990:48). We have already given reasons for suggesting that the debates in which John was involved are probably best described in other terms (above, ch.3).

explore the interpretation we have suggested in further detail.

We have seen already that one major point which 'the Jews' seem to have been concerned with and to have found objectionable in Christian christology was the claim that Jesus had been enthroned in heaven. As we have already noted, it is not entirely clear whether the issue was attributing too exalted a status to a human being, or rather the fact that the claims were being made specifically for Jesus.[30] At any rate, in Judaism, only God was eternal, and all others, even if they could be addressed as 'gods' in some sense, were lesser, created beings. Even outside of Judaism, in the wider Hellenistic world, it appears that the key difference between divinity in the truest sense and other lesser forms of divinity was *eternal existence*.[31] By presenting Jesus as the incarnation of one who was eternally worthy of this status alongside God, the Evangelist could legitimate his community's belief, by arguing that Jesus was not a blasphemous glory-seeker, nor even a divinized man, but one who, now incarnate, had returned to the place in heaven which was rightfully his.[32]

It is most likely as part of this legitimating presentation that John has (in contrast with earlier Christian writers) associated this exalted status, not with the

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[30] See our discussion above, ch. 3.

[31] Neyrey 1986:159-162; 1988:218-220. See above pp.134f.

[32] See also 3:13 and 6:62 on the place of the Son of Man in heaven as 'the place he was before', that is, the place which is rightfully his (see too 17:4). We shall have occasion to consider these Son of Man sayings below. Cf. also Painter 1984:470, who also understands the phrase εις τὸν κόλπον του πατρὸς to involve the return of the revealer to the situation in which the prologue began, namely his existence with God.

designation Son of Man, but with Wisdom/Logos imagery.[33] Although the exalted place of the Son of Man was widely accepted in Christian tradition, and also among at least some first century Jews, there is evidence from the later rabbinic literature of an uneasiness about such ideas in some rabbinic circles.[34] It may also perhaps be noteworthy that problems only seem to have arisen for the rabbis in connection with figures other than God who *sit* enthroned in heaven. The Christian claim that Jesus sits 'at the right hand of God' was regarded as 'blasphemous', just as later so was the messianic interpretation of 'thrones' in Daniel 7:9 attributed to R. Akiba.[35] While it may be that controversy only arose over certain individuals for whom claims were made, we must consider the possibility that some would have found it objectionable to make such exalted claims for any human being.

If some found it an insult to God to claim that a mere human being could sit in his presence, in contrast, the exalted place of Wisdom was far more widely accepted, whether in Christian circles, in the apocalyptic and the sapiential literature, or in the later Targumic and rabbinic works. This was presumably because Wisdom was not strictly a figure *other than God*.[36] It seems plausible to suggest that John does not

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[33] Cf. esp. Mk. 14:62 and pars.; Acts 7:56. Although the Evangelist elsewhere refers to the 'ascent' or exaltation of the Son of Man, there is no reference to Jesus specifically as 'Son of Man' in a position of honour alongside God in heaven. We shall consider the relationship between the 'Son of Man' and Wisdom/Logos later on (see 15.2 below).

[34] See pp. 86f above.

[35] Cf. *b.* Hag. 15a. See also 3 Enoch 16 in relation to Metatron, whose status in heaven was problematic at least partly because Metatron *sits* in heaven. See also above, ch.3, esp. pp. 86f. See too Segal 1977:60-66.

[36] Cf. Dunn 1989:168-176. See also Kanagaraj 1995:251-253.

speak of Jesus as the *Son of Man* sitting at God's right hand because it is as the incarnation of Wisdom or the Logos that Jesus is to be understood to occupy this place, and thus to be worthy of divine honours and to exercise divine functions. In Wis. 9:4ff, Wisdom is specifically said to "*sit* beside [God's] throne",[37] and Prov. 8:30 presents Wisdom at God's side.[38] It seems logical to suggest that this widely accepted status of Wisdom/Logos in Judaism is being appealed to by the Fourth Evangelist as justification for the exalted status that Christians attributed to Christ.

Legitimation also helps explain why John, in contrast with all earlier Christian literature, takes the step of using the specific designation λόγος. We have already noted that the term λόγος appears to have been more or less interchangeable with other terms (such as Wisdom) in Jewish literature of this period. However, if there is one feature which is, in the relevant Jewish literature, more clearly associated with the

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[37] See also Wis. 18:15, where the Word is implied to have been seated on the royal throne; also Wisd. 9:10; 1 Enoch 42:2. Cf. further Kanagaraj 1995:256f.

[38] Hofius 1989:165 and Evans 1993:91 refer to the MT of Prov. 8:30 as describing Wisdom as 'in God's bosom'. However, the meaning of this text is far from clear, and many interpret the difficult Hebrew word *'amon* as 'craftsman', which would make good sense in the context. The LXX also understood it differently, and thus we cannot be sure either that John knew this reading or that he understood it in this way.

It is not entirely clear whether the rabbis understood the word as having the meaning 'suckling', thus portraying Wisdom as 'like a child at the breast of' God (*contra* Hofius 1989:166-168). Hofius at any rate fails to do justice to the fact that the rabbis often interpreted words in unusual ways and then built on them interpretations which depend on a particular aspect of a particular sense of the word or term in question. Nonetheless it is not impossible that John may have been familiar with ideas similar to those found in *Aboth de R. Nathan* A §31; *Gen. Rab.* 8.2 (on 1:26) - cf. Evans 1993:120. At any rate, if Hofius is right, then it is at the very least clear that these later rabbis did not find the idea of Wisdom 'in the bosom of' God problematic, and if this was so also in John's time, this would have made the imagery all the more useful as part of his legitimation.

At any rate, this verse clearly refers to Wisdom 'at God's side', and therefore this imagery would be relevant to John's legitimation regardless of these other uncertainties.

imagery of God's *Word* than with that of God's *Wisdom*, it is the clear and unambiguous assertion of the divinity of the Logos. For example, Barrett remarks that Wisd. 7:25 is the closest that any early Jewish work comes to asserting explicitly the divinity of Wisdom.[39] On the other hand, in Philo there are clear instances of the Logos being called 'God'.[40] The term Memra is also clearly used to denote the interaction of God himself with the world,[41] and if this term was already being used in the Aramaic paraphrases of the Torah provided in the Synagogue, then John's imagery of the 'Word' would carry even more weight, being given its authority within the Synagogue itself. However, the dating and origins of the ideas preserved in the Targums is a complex field, and certainty on this last point seems impossible.[42] It seems clear, however, that John emphasizes both the pre-existence prior to creation, and the full divinity, of the one who became incarnate in Christ, in a way (or at the very least to an extent) that no earlier Christian work did, and the most likely reason for this, we suggest, is that John is here appealing to and developing traditional language and motifs in order to defend his community's christological beliefs.

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[39] Barrett 1978:155.

[40] Such as *Somn.*1.39 §230; *Qu.Gen.*2.62; the Logos is also called 'divine' (θεῖος) in *Fug.*18 §97; 19 §101; *Qu.Ex.*2.68; *Op.Mund.*5 §20; *Migr.Abr.*31 §174

[41] See McNamara 1972:101-106; Hayward 1978; Evans 1993:126-129; also Barker 1992:134-148.

[42] Manns is confident that John was aware of Targumic traditions. "Pour présenter la catéchèse sur le Fils de Dieu à des milieux judéo-chrétiens fortement monothéistes, Jean souligne très habilement les préparations juives effectuées par la Synagogue elle-même" (1991:41). On the complex subject of dating the Targums see further McNamara 1966:45-66; 1972:86-89; Grossfeld 1988:30-35. That some traditions found in the Targums are early is not disputed, but determining *which ones* is in most cases impossible. If Memra *is* an early concept, then John's allusions in v14 to other similar terms and images, such as Shekinah, glory, and the image of tabernacling (used of Wisdom in Sir.24:8) would reinforce his legitimating portrait of Jesus. See further Barker 1992:146-148,158; Evans 1993:123-126 on the similarities between the Targumic *Memra* and Philo's Logos; cf. also McGrath 1997c:105f.

7.3.2 Jesus and the Spirit

The way in which the Evangelist is creating his legitimating portrait of Jesus out of earlier beliefs and ideas becomes clearer when we connect the prologue with the narrative which immediately follows it, namely John's description of the witness borne by John the Baptist to Jesus.[43] In 1:32f we are told that the Spirit not only descended upon Jesus, but *remained* on him. This is closely related to the description in 1:14 of the Word 'becoming flesh' or 'appearing on the human scene as flesh', suggesting a decisive new mode of existence which is different than previous appearances in human history, whether in the form of theophanies or in the inspiration of the prophets.[44] Here John is thus making use of a traditional point of Christian (and Jewish) belief, that the Messiah was (or would be) indwelt by God's Spirit/Wisdom, and drawing out from it that the Spirit has not only indwelt Jesus in a decisive and complete way, but has become wholly 'fused' with Jesus,[45] with the result that what

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[43] On Spirit, Word and Wisdom as essentially synonymous see above 2.2.1.

[44] Cf. Dunn 1989:243,249; also Sanders 1968:80. Given the equivalence of Logos, Wisdom and Spirit which we already noted above, it seems likely that the event described in John 1:14 as 'the Word becoming flesh' would have been understood by the earliest readers and hearers of the Fourth Gospel to refer to this event, which in the Synoptics is associated with Jesus' baptism. So Fuller 1976:61-66; Hartin 1985:45; Schoonenberg 1986:405; Watson 1987; Talbert 1993; McGrath 1996:4f. See also Brown 1979:152f; Theobald 1992:67f. Early 'orthodox' fathers, although they harmonized John and the Synoptics by regarding the incarnation of the Logos having taken place at Jesus' *conception*, nonetheless frequently attest that there was no real distinction between speaking of the Logos or the Spirit as incarnate in Jesus (Schoonenberg 1986:416; cf. Hermas, *Sim.*6.4.5; Tertullian, *Adv.Prax.* 27; and the apologists Justin 1 *Apology* 33, Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 7.1 and Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 2.10 (on these last two see Sanders 1943:26,36). Irenaeus makes more of a distinction between the Son and the Spirit, although he strikingly identifies the former as the Word and the latter as Wisdom). If these were not parallel descriptions of the same event, we might have to think of God's Word/Spirit being made flesh not once, but twice, which seems unnecessarily difficult.

[45] Watson 1987:118f; Talbert 1993:50f. This point appears to have been an issue among the 'secessionists' opposed by the author of the Johannine epistles, and also in later Gnostic writings. Cf. Pagels 1979:chs.2,5; Theobald 1981:412f; Hengel 1989a:57-63; Dunn 1990:198f. See also Dunn 1989:266 and Schoonenberg 1986:416-418 on the problems and prospects of the

could be attributed to Wisdom/Spirit could now also be attributed to Jesus. In other words, John here appeals to the traditional belief that Jesus the Messiah was indwelt by God's Spirit or Wisdom, in order to justify the exalted place attributed to Jesus by Christians. If Dunn is correct, then in so doing he may have been the first to develop the idea of Jesus as one who is 'inspired' into the idea of him as one in whom God's Wisdom is 'incarnate'.[46] There is a very fine line between the two, and the differences between John and earlier Christian writings should not be exaggerated, but nonetheless there is a distinction.[47] But whether John was the first to cross this boundary or not, there is certainly a difference of emphasis in John, and this was most likely motivated by the need of his community for a defence of its beliefs against the objections raised by members of the local Jewish synagogue.[48]

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relationship between Christ, Wisdom and Spirit when attempting to bring together the various strands of New Testament christology.

[46] As we noted above, Matthew's Jesus had already spoken in the first person as Wisdom, but this may still be a phenomenon connected with inspiration rather than incarnation, since in the Odes of Solomon the author speaks with Christ's voice in the first person without losing his own identity or being wholly and permanently identified with Christ. In the long term, the Johannine development appears to have led to the belief that the Spirit communicated the voice not only of God, but of Christ, which in turn provoked further christological development and a closer identification of Christ and God. See also Dunn 1991a:321f. Robinson 1985:379-394 downplays the differences between John and earlier writings. This in some ways provided a helpful challenge and counterbalance to the majority of studies, which have for the most part overemphasized John's distinctiveness. See the useful dialogue between Dunn, Wiles and Robinson in *Theology* 85 (1982).

[47] On which see Dunn 1992b:398f.

[48] This is not to say that the Evangelist would have understood himself to be making a major development. From his perspective, it probably seemed

It may also be significant that John the Baptist's witness to the Spirit's descent upon Jesus is linked in the tradition with the promise that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Max Turner has suggested that the bestowal of the Spirit by Jesus was a clear instance of the exercising by Jesus of a divine function, which made a 'divine' christology more-or-less inevitable.[49] To a certain extent we agree, but would want to stress that this feature of christology made a development inevitable *because it became controversial*. Had certain Jews never raised objections to such Christian claims, these developments might never have been necessary. But as it is, John was compelled to legitimate his community's beliefs, and here we seem to have another example of this. Jesus is not just a human being, but the human being in whom the Spirit has come to dwell *permanently*, and this means that no one can receive the Spirit of God apart from Christ.[50] This is also directly connected to the issue of Christ's ascension, since it is the *risen* Christ who bestows the Spirit.[51] However, it must be stressed that it is not clear from the Fourth Gospel that this specific aspect of Christian belief - Jesus as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit - was at issue in the Johannine conflict with the synagogue. Nevertheless, the whole topic of Jesus carrying out divine functions clearly was an

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that he was merely drawing out the implications of what Christians had always believed.

[49] Turner 1982:183.

[50] Theobald 1992:65-68. 16:14f suggests that the Spirit's indwelling is closely related to Jesus' unity with God and his role as God's agent. See also Pryor 1992:13, and our earlier discussions of divine agency.

[51] Although 20:22 is somewhat ambiguous, the meaning of 7:39 seems clearly to indicate that it is only when Jesus is glorified that the Spirit is given. Cf. Dunn 1970:174,177f.

issue, and it is therefore possible that the specific issue of Jesus' agency in mediating the gift of the Spirit was important as part of this debate.

7.3.3 Jesus as 'God'?

Before we conclude, we must mention one further aspect of John's portrait here - the possible use of θεός in v18 in reference to the exalted Christ. We saw earlier that it is not entirely clear whether Jesus was called 'God' by Christians prior to John's time,[52] and when this ambiguity is combined with that of the textual attestation of variant readings in this verse,[53] it begins to appear extremely unwise to draw any hard and fast conclusions concerning John's development of earlier christological ideas in relation to this point and/or in connection with this part of the text. Nonetheless, it is worth considering what implications John's use or non-use of θεός here would have had in the context of Johannine legitimation.

If John did not call the exalted Christ 'God' here, this is unlikely to have been because this was unacceptable to him, since in 20:28 it is generally agreed that the risen Christ is confessed as 'God'.[54] Perhaps the Evangelist did not use his portrayal here to justify calling Jesus 'God' because he did not want to place an unnecessary stumbling block before

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[52] See above 2.2.7.

[53] For differing assessments of the evidence see the discussions in McReynolds 1981; Manns 1991:22; Harris 1992:74-83; Davies 1992:123f; Ehrman 1993:78-82.

[54] See also our discussion of John 10 in ch.6 above.

readers who had not yet made up their minds concerning such Christian claims about Jesus, and were wavering between the arguments of the synagogue leaders and those of the Johannine Christians: he thus left this climactic confession until the end of his work, by which point the reader had been adequately prepared for it. Perhaps there is no reason - while the inclusion of the designation needs an explanation, its omission does not necessarily, since it may not even have occurred to the Evangelist to use the term here. On the other hand, if John did designate the exalted Christ as θεός here, it may have been to legitimate its use by earlier Christians: the exalted Jesus may be called 'God' not simply because he is the last Adam, or because he is the prophet like Moses and superior to Moses, but because he is the Word made flesh.[55] Unfortunately, this important aspect of John's work of legitimation will continue to remain obscure due to the textual uncertainties in this verse.

What is certain, however, is that our study thus far has yielded important insights into the development of Johannine christology and the work of legitimation which spurred it on. In the Johannine context, the exalted status attributed to Christ had come to the fore as an issue of contention between the Johannine Christians and the synagogue leaders. In order to defend his community's beliefs, the Evangelist appealed to authoritative traditions in order to prove that his faith was in accord with Judaism's (and Christianity's) scriptures and

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[55] Once again see above 2.2.7.

traditions.[56] Thus here, at the very beginning of the Gospel, the Evangelist brought the traditional pictures of Jesus exalted to God's right hand, and of Jesus as the one in whom God's Spirit/Wisdom dwells, together, using the latter to justify the former. In doing so, John not only appealed to these traditions, but developed them, altering the imagery of the exalted Christ alongside God, and identifying the human being Jesus more fully with the Word, Wisdom or Spirit of God. Legitimation, we may conclude, provides an explanation of what motivated John to take these steps, and to cross the fine line which separates earlier 'inspirational' christologies from his 'incarnational' one.

7.4 Summary

We have seen in this chapter, as had already been suggested by our treatment of other passages in the Gospel, that John is using traditional Wisdom ideas to legitimate the exalted status attributed to Jesus by Christians. In developing the tradition in the ways that he did, the Evangelist has taken an important step. In earlier Christian (and Jewish) tradition, we find Jesus (or in Jewish works the Messiah) thought of as indwelt by God's Wisdom or Spirit.[57] Earlier Christian writers like Paul and Matthew do not show any clear indication of having moved beyond the categories of *inspiration*.[58] John, on

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[56] Cf. Whitacre 1982:10f,25; Rowland 1985:246-248,303; Theobald 1992:59-63.

[57] See above 2.2.1; also Isa. 11:2; 61:1; 1 En. 49:3. Hartman 1987:97, cites as a further relevant parallel Wisd. 7:27, which describes Wisdom's entrance into holy souls in each generation.

[58] Again see our discussion in 2.2.1 above.

the other hand, appears to have moved from a complete *inspiration* to *incarnation*, a step which, although it should not be exaggerated, is of great significance. Philo's *Logos* was a useful metaphor, a way of dealing with the problem of a transcendent God who interacts with the world. When John takes it up and uses it to defend the legitimacy of his christological beliefs, he identifies this personification with a person. Some might say that it was inevitable that this identification would push Christian belief away from monotheism in the strictest sense towards a binitarian or trinitarian understanding of God.[59] But 'inevitability' sounds like the sort of polemical language used by the victors, who write history with the benefit of hindsight.[60] Issues relating to monotheism do not appear to have arisen until well after John's time, and John could hardly have been aware of the implications which his adaptation of these traditional beliefs might have for future generations of Christians, who would read his Gospel in very different contexts from his own. It

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[59] And it may be that this hymn in praise of the Word, now identified with Jesus, was an important development in the worship of Jesus, which Hurtado (1988:101) and others have pointed to as playing a key role in the development of christology. However, this hymn is, in our view, the *result* of the Johannine controversy rather than its *cause*, suggesting that developments in the area of the worship of Jesus and related questions about monotheism and 'two powers' are to be dated later than the Fourth Gospel (see further ch.3 above). The present author doubts whether even the complete identification of Jesus and Logos made full-blown Trinitarianism in the Nicene sense *necessary*: the developments which led up to the Nicene formulation are themselves due to controversy and legitimation, but a controversy which centred on issues not raised in John's time. It was John's Gospel, read in light of those issues, which made further developments necessary. See further ch. 3 above. We may also mention that it was very likely John's complete identification of the Word with Jesus, while the Spirit-Paraclete is spoken of as 'another comforter' who will indwell the church, that probably helped push Christian belief in trinitarian rather than simply binitarian directions. However, the church's triune formulae were also a major factor, and it nonetheless was some time before any sort of clear distinction was made between Word and Spirit.

[60] Ashton 1994:89 rightly warns against assuming that the developments which did take place were in fact inevitable.

seems unwise to speculate as to what John might have said if he had lived in a later time, when these issues had been raised. For John, his legitimating portrait of Jesus was a solution to a different, immediately pressing problem, namely that of how to demonstrate that his community's beliefs about Jesus' exalted status in heaven, and about his role in the plan of God, should be adhered to faithfully by Christians and accepted by non-Christians.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION TO PART 2

Having examined the main passages in the Fourth Gospel which relate to the conflict between the Johannine Christians and 'the Jews' over the relationship between Jesus and God, we may now seek to draw together the overall results and conclusions which arise from this section of the thesis.

First, we have found no reason to deny or qualify the Evangelist's statement of his purpose in 20:31. His aim is to convince people (whether those who already believe or unbelievers is irrelevant for our present purposes) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. For example, we have found no evidence that the Evangelist is seeking to defend the idea that Jesus is the Word-become-flesh; rather, the Word/Wisdom imagery which we have encountered appears to serve as part of a defence of the Messiahship of Jesus as understood by many, if not indeed most or all, early Christians. The Evangelist seeks to defend and legitimate the Christian view of Jesus as the one to whom God has given authority as his agent and viceroy, who sits at God's right hand, and even bears God's own name. All of these ideas are earlier than John, and the distinctively Johannine use of the imagery and ideas which he inherited from early Judaism and Christianity we have seen to be part of John's legitimation. John has used and adapted aspects of the traditions and ideas he inherited in order to enable or convince his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and more specifically that the roles

and status which Christians attribute to him as such are legitimate. In some cases, his arguments appear to have relied on Christian beliefs, which means that his portrait would have carried more weight as a defense of Christian beliefs for believers than as an attempt to convince non-Christian Jews to believe.

Second, it is interesting that in the three narratives which we considered (John 5, 8, 10) there was a degree of ambiguity present in the accusations made by 'the Jews'. In John 5 'the Jews' accuse Jesus of 'making himself equal to God', which represents a misunderstanding of what is being claimed for Jesus: he is God's Son and agent, wholly subordinate to the Father but bearing his full authority to do what he does and act on his behalf. In John 8, we saw that 'the Jews' may have understood Jesus' 'I am' to mean 'I am Yahweh', whereas the Johannine Jesus' claim seems to have been that he bears the divine name as God's agent. Likewise in John 10, we found that 'the Jews' may have interpreted Jesus' assertion, 'I and the Father are one' to mean 'I am the Father' or 'I am equal to the Father'.[1] The motif of misunderstanding is clearly a Johannine *literary* motif, but it nonetheless may perhaps reflect an aspect of the relationship between the Johannine Christians and the synagogue. The Johannine Christians probably felt that their beliefs were not only being rejected, but were being rejected because they had

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[1] Note also the parallel contrasts connected with these misunderstandings: In John 5, Jesus says he is God's Son, yet seems to make himself equal with God; in John 8, Jesus is not yet 50 years old, and yet claims to have seen (or been seen by) Abraham; In John 10, Jesus is a 'mere man', and yet apparently claims to be 'God'. On the motif of misunderstanding in John see also Létourneau 1993:381-395.

been misunderstood. They perhaps even felt that their views were being maliciously misrepresented. The Evangelist's use of the motif of misunderstanding probably does not represent an attempt to convert 'the Jews', but to reinforce his own community's sense that their beliefs have been rejected wrongly, and that 'the Jews' are culpable for not having understood and believed things that the Johannine Christians felt should have been clear from scripture and Jewish tradition.

It should also be mentioned that it appears difficult to define what was at issue in these passages more precisely than we have done. It is still not entirely clear whether the issue was (a) claiming too exalted a status for *any* human being - even if that human being is the Messiah, or (b) claiming an exalted status for one who was regarded as a false and failed Messiah. Further research into this question may help illuminate and clarify even further our understanding of the Fourth Gospel. However, there does appear to be sufficient evidence to justify our conclusion that the issue in the controversy was not the oneness of God, but rather the making of exalted claims for one whom the Jewish opponents of the Johannine Christians were convinced had not been appointed by God. Ultimately, the question of whether, from the point of view of these opponents, to make such exalted claims for *any* human figure would have been equally objectionable, appears unanswerable. Nevertheless, the emphasis in these passages on the issue of whether Jesus was '*making himself*' certain things implies that the heart of the issue was whether Jesus had been appointed by God. The Jewish opponents did not believe Jesus

had been appointed by God and thus regarded him as a political danger and a blasphemer. The Johannine Christians accepted that Jesus was God's appointed agent, and thus they sought to show both that Jesus was sent by God, and also that the claims being made for him were in no way blasphemous.

It is perhaps ironic that the christology which developed in the later church, as a result of the developments evidenced in John, probably *were* subject to the critique made by 'the Jews'. Jesus did come to be affirmed as 'equal to God' in a much fuller sense, and to be identified completely with the God of the Old Testament. Such developments were in many ways a natural progression from John's own christology, read and interpreted in the light of, and in response to, later disputes over christology. However, it would be as wrong to read these later development into John as it would be to read Johannine christology into earlier Christian literature.

Let us sum up the findings of Part 2. In all of the passages which we examined, we found evidence that the debate with 'the Jews' reflected in John did not focus on the distinctive elements of Johannine christology, but on earlier Christian beliefs. Of course, in the period after John was written, the conflict will very likely have continued, and may then have come to focus on the developments which John made. This period, however, lies beyond the scope of the present study.[2] In response to the objections which had been raised, the Evangelist sought to defend his community's beliefs by appealing to various aspects of the Jewish and Christian

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[2] Although the Evangelist (or a subsequent redactor) may perhaps give a brief glimpse into this period in chapter 6, and perhaps also in parts of chapter 8. See below, 11.4.

scriptures and traditions. In making use of these traditions in this way, his overall portrait and understanding of Christ was - at times subtly, but nonetheless significantly - altered, in ways that would eventually move Christian doctrine in directions that could not have been foreseen prior to this. The model of legitimation spurring on or producing development in doctrine which we have proposed thus seems to be able to illuminate the important question of *why* Johannine christology developed along the lines that it did.

PART 3

JESUS , MOSES & TORAH

PART THREE

JESUS AND MOSES

We may now turn to the second major theme that we shall be considering in relation to the christological legitimation found in John's Gospel, the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses, and the revelation brought by each, as a point of controversy in the church-synagogue debates. Here - in contrast with Part 2 - it will not be necessary to give extensive treatment to introductory matters, since we do not have any reason to disagree with the widely held view that the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses, and between their respective revelations, was an important issue in the controversy between the Johannine church and the synagogue.[1] In this section we shall once again consider four key passages which relate to this issue: The prologue (1:1-18) and chs. 3, 6 and 9. Each will be discussed in turn, after which we shall attempt to tie together the findings from each section.

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[1] See our discussion of John's relationship to earlier Christian tradition at this point in 2.2.3 above; see also Martyn 1979:102-130; Boismard 1988; Smith 1995:126.

CHAPTER 9

THE WORD AND THE GLORY (JOHN 1:1-18)

9.1 Evidence of Legitimation

We have already reviewed in chapter 7 the indications that the prologue reflects a controversy setting and that it represents an attempt to legitimate certain belief, and thus we need not review this evidence again here.[1]

9.2 The Focus of the Conflict and its Relation to Earlier Tradition

One of the debates which underlies the prologue of the Fourth Gospel is the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses and their respective revelations.[2] This can be seen explicitly in 1:17, where some sort of contrast/comparison is made between Jesus and Moses. However, it is also implicit in a number of other features: the application to Christ of imagery connected with the Torah (with which Wisdom had been identified) in Jewish tradition, and the allusions to traditions connected with Moses at Sinai (such as seeing God in 1:18, and grace and truth in 1:17).[3]

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[1] See above 7.1. To avoid unnecessary repetition, we shall presuppose in this chapter the results of our earlier discussion of the prologue in ch.7 above.

[2] For the issue of the relationship between Jesus and God in the prologue see our discussion in ch. 7, above.

[3] Boismard 1953:169. Hanson 1980:99f seems to have shown convincingly that the phrase is intended to reflect Exodus 34:6, the view also taken by most commentators. See also Loader 1992:159, and our discussion below.

The imagery which John uses, and his overall portrait of Jesus here, are based on earlier Christian discussions of this issue. In view of the poetic or hymnic character of the prologue, the closest New Testament parallel outside the Johannine corpus is probably Col. 1:15-20. There we find Wisdom language and imagery being applied to Jesus, and this use of such imagery is best understood as a response to the application of similar imagery to Torah in Jewish writings: the message of this hymnic passage is that it is in Christ, and not Torah, that God's Wisdom dwells in all its fullness.[4] The question of the place of the Jewish Law in the Christian life is one of the major themes addressed in Colossians.[5] Likewise in Hebrews, which focuses on the contrast between Jesus and Moses and their respective covenants, we find the epistle introduced with similar poetic Wisdom (and glory) imagery (1:1-3, where the immediate context is a contrast between God having spoken in partial ways in the past through prophets, of whom Moses is one, and the fuller revelation now given through Jesus).[6] John was not the first to discuss the relationship

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[4] Cf. e.g. Davies 1955:150-152; Wright 1991b:118; McGrath 1998a:44f. Schnabel 1985:298f is correct to assert that for Paul Wisdom and Torah are no longer to be identified, but does insufficient justice to the fact that this former identification in Judaism provides a large part of the reason for the identification of Jesus as the embodiment of God's Wisdom. He provides (1985:233f,245,264) very clear evidence that Paul was familiar with the earlier Jewish identification of Wisdom and Torah. The logical conclusion to draw is that, for Paul, the portrayal of Jesus in Wisdom categories was part of an attempt to provide a Jesus-centred rather than Torah-centred version of Judaism. This fits extremely well with what we know of both Paul (including the issues he was most concerned with) and his background.

[5] Cf. Hooker 1973:329-331; Dunn 1996:34,85,89.

[6] Cf. D'Angelo 1979:168-174.

between Jesus and Moses, nor the first to apply Wisdom imagery to this subject.[7]

However, John does not contrast Jesus and Moses in exactly the same way that Paul and Hebrews do. The problems with reading 1:17, as it were, through Pauline spectacles, have been addressed by several scholars.[8] Wisdom imagery is not the exclusive possession of those who made this sort of contrast in a sharper way. Wisdom is also important for Matthew, who compares Jesus to Moses but nonetheless regards Torah much more positively.[9] The Hebrews and Colossians texts are very likely hymnic fragments quoted by the authors of these epistles, and may thus represent part of the wider heritage of the church, affirmations of belief which different groups shared in common (but perhaps understood slightly differently). At any rate, John is clearly dealing with an issue which was widespread in early Christianity, and which was not limited to the 'Torah free' Pauline circle of churches.

The language of 'glory' (John 1:14) was also important in this context. This language was used in the transfiguration account in Luke, and as we shall see later, several scholars have proposed that John here shows awareness of the transfiguration traditions.[10] A similar comparison between the

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[7] See further McGrath 1998a on the development of Wisdom christology (and also 2.2.1 above). De Boer 1996:114,116 does not appear to do justice to this link with tradition in John's use of Wisdom imagery, in contrast with his recognition on many other points that John is developing tradition in response to Jewish objections.

[8] Pancaro 1975:537; Edwards 1988; Harris 1994:64f. See also McGrath 1996:8f. It is surely significant (and somewhat amusing) that the only text which Hanson cites to support his statement that in John 1:17 "The giving of the Law is certainly regarded as temporary, obsolete, and above all indirect" is Galatians 3:19 (1980:104)!

[9] Cf. Suggs 1970; Johnson 1974; France 1989:304; Allison 1993:229f.

[10] See below, pp.236f.

glory of Moses' face when he came from meeting with God, and the glory of Jesus, is also to be found in one of Paul's letters, 2 Cor. 3:7-18. We do not need to discuss Paul's 'midrash' in detail here;[11] for our purposes it is sufficient that once again we have clear evidence that the issues John is discussing and the terminology which he is using are in fact pre-Johannine. John is, in the prologue to his Gospel, addressing the issue, which had arisen much earlier, of the relationship between Jesus and Moses, and in doing so he also makes use of much traditional imagery.

9.3 The Johannine Response

As we have seen, John's use of Wisdom categories to interpret the significance of Christ in comparison/contrast to that of Moses/Torah is closely related to similar approaches taken by earlier New Testament authors. John presents Jesus as the embodiment, as the appearance in human history, of that which 'the Jews' claimed was to be found in Torah, namely Wisdom and light.[12] Jewish thought had already presented this Wisdom (which was identified with Torah) as the instrument of creation,[13] and the early Christians responded by applying such language to Christ. John takes this up from earlier Christianity, presenting Jesus in the language of Wisdom, the Word of creation.

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[11] For further discussion of this passage see Dunn 1989:143f; 1990a:88,91.

[12] For John's relationship to earlier Christian writers here see above 2.2.1. For the Jewish background cf. Sir. 24:23,25; Bar. 3:36-4:4; also Wisd. 6:18. On light and word as connected with Torah cf. Borgen 1987a:87f. See too Boismard 1953:144f; Dunn 1991a:315f; de Boer 1996:114-116.

[13] Cf. e.g. Prov. 8:22-31; Wis. 6:12-11:1.

What, then, is distinctive about John? Has the ongoing debate on this subject in the intervening period led John to go beyond what these other authors did? The answer to the latter question is to be answered in the affirmative, and as we have already suggested,[14] the distinctive aspect of John's Wisdom christology is to be found in his complete identification of Jesus with Wisdom: Wisdom has not simply inspired or indwelt Jesus, but has 'become flesh', has appeared on the human scene *as* the human being Jesus. Earlier writers applied Wisdom imagery to Jesus, which John also does; but John goes further, identifying the Word with Jesus in a fuller way than any earlier writer had. John thus places his Wisdom-hymn at the beginning of the Gospel, so that everything else may be read through its lens. Wisdom imagery and motifs also pervade and undergird the entire Gospel, as the fundamental substructure of its christology.[15] This is in marked contrast to all other New Testament authors. For Paul, while we cannot enter into the ongoing debate about centre and periphery in Paul, it seems clear that Wisdom is less central than other, more frequently occurring christological motifs, such as, for example, those connected with Adam. For Hebrews, the central christological idea is almost certainly the idea of Jesus as High Priest, and perhaps also the contrast with Moses.[16] Moses seems to be central for Matthew,[17] while Wisdom imagery is simply a

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[14] Above 2.2.1; 7.3.2.

[15] Cf. esp. Willett 1992, *passim*.

[16] Although Hebrews begins with Wisdom language, it cannot be said to pervade the entire portrait in the same way that it does in John.

'footnote', a peripheral element that appears only in isolated passages.[18]

The ways in which moving this traditional imagery to the centre of his christological portrait of Jesus would have benefited his legitimation need to be considered. For one thing, by identifying Jesus not only as the human being who embodies God's Wisdom, but as the human being whom Wisdom became, John was able to give Jesus a priority of place and authority which was beyond that of Moses. In a manner that is at the very least more explicit than earlier Christian writers, John presents Jesus clearly and unambiguously as God's Word, Wisdom and Glory *become flesh*. Although Paul does at one point assert in passing that Christ is 'the Wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:24), this does not come close to John's 'metaphysical' affirmations: For John, more clearly than for any earlier Christian author, Jesus is the incarnation of personified Wisdom. By placing 'glory' alongside the language of Logos and 'tabernacling', one could almost say that John has turned it into a metaphysical category of sorts.[19]

In this way, John was able to stress the superiority of Jesus over Moses: he claims, in effect, that the one who has now 'become flesh' as the human being Jesus Christ is the one whom Moses may have caught a glimpse of, but whose glory is now

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[17] Davies 1964:25ff (who rightly notes that Mosaic categories do not exhaust Matthew's christology); Allison 1993, *passim*.

[18] Johnson 1974:64.

[19] And, if Dunn is correct, crossed the boundary between inspiration and incarnation; see above 7.3.2; 7.4. The apparent identification made by Philo between certain scriptural figures and Wisdom is not really a parallel, since these figures appear to be taken as *types* of Wisdom rather than as *incarnations* of Wisdom. Cf. further Dunn 1989:173.

fully revealed to Christians. Hanson reaches this conclusion on the basis of internal considerations alone: since John asserts that no one had ever seen God, but that the only begotten has made him known, then John must be interpreting the apparent visions of God in the Jewish scriptures as visions of the pre-existent Logos.[20] Further confirmation of this is found in the description of Christ in the same language as is used to describe the theophany to Moses on Sinai: 'glory', 'full of grace and truth'.[21] In addition, there are external indicators which support such an interpretation. Philo suggests that Moses 'saw God', but since this is impossible, he must in fact have seen the Logos, who is the 'visible' of the invisible God, God made known.[22]

The Targums also refer to Moses as having met or spoken, not directly with God himself, but with the Word or Spirit of God.[23] Several scholars have presented the similarities between these passages and ideas reflected in early Christianity, and while it is admittedly impossible to assume an early date for Targumic traditions, this is one of many cases where the similarities with ideas found in early Christianity and early Judaism suggest that the Targumic traditions may reflect a widespread, relatively early approach to the interpretation of scripture.

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[20] Hanson 1980:102-104.

[21] Hanson 1965:110f; 1980:99f.

[22] Cf. *Spec. Leg.* 1.47; *Post.* 13,15. See further D'Angelo 1978:180-186.

[23] Cf. the texts cited in McNamara 1966:182-188; 1972:108-112.

John appears to have in mind here in the prologue the Exodus/Sinai traditions in the Jewish scriptures.[24] Just as in John 3 it is denied that Moses ascended, so here it is denied that Moses actually saw God: Moses saw the Logos, the one who alone can see God. The difference between Jesus and Moses is thus one of kind rather than degree: the Word *spoke to* Moses, but *became* Jesus; in Johannine terminology, the Word *gave* revelation through Moses, but *appeared on the scene of human history* as the human being Jesus.[25] John is thus using traditional Wisdom categories, but has identified Jesus and Wisdom more fully and completely than any other before him, thus altering in subtle but extremely important ways his understanding of Jesus.[26]

9.4 Summary

The issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses is only one issue which is addressed in the prologue, as we have already shown.[27] In relation to the issue being discussed in this chapter, we have seen (1) that John is closely related here to earlier Jewish and Christian tradition, and that (2) he is developing those traditions in response to a specific issue

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[24] Most scholars agree that John is here interacting with Exodus 33f (cf. in particular Hanson 1980:97-109).

[25] Cf. John 1:17; Barrett 1978:165. On a possible similar emphasis in Hebrews cf. D'Angelo 1979:174-199, although see the reservations we have voiced above on p.81 n.21.

[26] Note also that the two scriptural narratives which underlie the prologue, the stories of creation and the Exodus, are precisely the two key points in the story of Wisdom/Logos.

[27] See ch.7 above. Our discussion here has been kept brief so as to avoid repeating evidence and discussions which have already been presented in our earlier treatment of the prologue.

in the debates between the Johannine Christians and 'the Jews'. Here John's approach is particularly close to that of his predecessors, although there are also important differences from and developments beyond them. John makes use of traditional Wisdom categories in order to emphasize the superiority of Jesus and his revelation in contrast to Moses: the one whom Moses revealed has now appeared on the scene of human history as a human being, as Jesus Christ. Legitimation is once again an important key to understanding the emphases and concerns of the Evangelist, and thereby also the ways in which he developed the traditions he inherited, and the factors which motivated him to do so.

CHAPTER 10

DESCENT AND ASCENT (JOHN 3:1-21)

10.1 Evidence of Legitimation

There is a large amount of agreement that, on one level at least, the dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21 reflects the debates which the Johannine community had with local Jews.[1] Although the language used in this section is in some ways less openly hostile than that used in some other parts of the Gospel, there is still a strong polemical dualism present, distinguishing between 'us' and 'you' (3:7,11),[2] belief and unbelief (3:12,15,18), light and darkness (3:19-21). These themes suggest that John is engaging here in debate with or polemic against 'the Jews', and that we may thus expect him also to provide legitimation for points which were at issue in this controversy.

10.2 The Point at Issue in the Conflict

Since Odeberg's work on this passage, it has become more and more widely accepted that John 3:13 reflects a polemic against claims made for other figures to have ascended into heaven, whether figures like Moses and Elijah, or Merkabah mystics.[3]

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[1] Meeks 1967:298f; Sanders 1968:126; Martyn 1979:131; Haenchen 1984:1:202; Borgen 1987a:103f (=1977:263f). Martyn's position (1979:121-123,128,131) is somewhat unclear, since he sees a 'midrashic' discussion of whether Jesus is the Prophet like Moses in this passage, and yet regards the Evangelist as opposed to the attempt to demonstrate Christian claims through 'midrashic' debate.

[2] Cf. Nicholson 1983:86-90.

[3] Odeberg 1929:72. Also Meeks 1967:297-299,301; 1986:147; Lindars 1972:156; Hamerton-Kelly 1973:230; Moloney 1978:54-57; Segal 1981:255f; Nicholson 1983:91f; Borgen 1987a:103f; Hare 1990:85f; Ashton 1991:350;

As we have already seen, the question of the relative value of the revelations brought by Jesus and Moses was an important one in the community's debates with the synagogue, and it is therefore likely to be Moses in particular who is in view here.[4] In many streams of Jewish tradition, Moses was believed to have ascended to heaven to receive the Torah. Philo speaks of Moses having "entered into the darkness where God was; that is to say, into the invisible, and shapeless, and incorporeal world, the essence, which is the model of all existing things, where he beheld things invisible to mortal nature."[5] Another clear piece of evidence, roughly contemporary with John, that Moses' ascent up Sinai was understood as in some sense an ascent to heaven, is found in Pseudo-Philo, who describes Moses' descent from the mountain as a descent to "the place where the light of the sun and moon are", implying that he had previously been above this region in the heavenly realm.[6] The well-known rabbinic polemic against the idea that Moses ascended into heaven also provides evidence that this view was widespread, since it is clearly arguing against a generally accepted position.[7] "The polemic presupposes practice."[8]

Carson 1991:200f; Dunn 1991a:307,310; Painter 1992:1879; Kanagaraj 1995:161,165; also Moses 1996:222f. Burkett (1991:78-82) argues against this view, but his attempt to limit the ἐπουράνια to 'the heavenly aspects of salvation' is unconvincing.

[4] So e.g. Moloney 1978:57; Martyn 1979:142; Ashton 1991:353f; Carson 1991:200f; Witherington 1995:100. On other figures who were believed to have ascended to heaven see Odeberg 1929:72f.

[5] Philo, *Mos.* I.158. See also the reference to his 'calling above' cited immediately below.

[6] Ps-Philo 12:1.

[7] *b.* Sukkah 5a; *Mek.* Exod. 19,20. For further discussion of this topic and the evidence for it see Meeks 1967:205-209.

[8] Meeks 1967:141, in connection with a similar polemic in Josephus.

The statement of Nicodemus which opens this chapter may also indicate that the dialogue which follows will focus on the Jesus as the 'Prophet like Moses',[9] since he speaks of Jesus as a teacher sent by God[10] whose commission is confirmed by miraculous signs.[11] However, Brown is correct to caution that Nicodemus' faith was probably not so profound, for if he had indeed recognized Jesus as the 'Prophet like Moses' his statement would have been responded to more favourably.[12] Nonetheless it seems to be the case that the language used by Nicodemus alludes to this aspect of Jesus' identity, even though Nicodemus has not grasped the full implications of these things for his understanding of who Jesus is.[13] Taken with the explicit and implicit comparisons with Moses in 3:13f, there is good reason to conclude that this is the issue with which the Evangelist is concerned here.

Further indication that the dialogue with Nicodemus is best understood against the background of the Johannine debate with the synagogue over the respective value of Moses' and Jesus' revelation is to be found in the mention in John 3:3 of birth ἄνωθεν.[14] Philo writes in

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[9] So e.g. Pryor 1992:19.

[10] Moloney 1978:47 rightly draws attention to LXX Exod. 3:12 in connection with this.

[11] On signs as part of the Mosaic typology see 12.3.1 below.

[12] Brown 1966:137.

[13] See also Carson 1991:187.

[14] The question of whether the Evangelist intended the term to be understood as 'again' or 'from above' (or both) is not relevant to the present discussion, since it is clearly a second birth of heavenly origin that is in view. See further Grese 1988:691.

Qu. Exod. 2:46 that "the calling above of the prophet is a second birth (δεύτερα γένεσις) better than the first." There is also a statement along similar lines in the rabbinic literature: in Cant. Rab. 8:2, R. Berekiah is reported to have said that at Sinai "Israel became like a new-born child."[15] Although the latter is a relatively late text, it is not the only occurrence of the idea in the rabbinic corpus, and thus, notwithstanding its later date, seems to confirm that the idea to which Philo bears witness was also known in other streams of Jewish thought.[16] The events at Sinai were closely linked with the idea of rebirth.

The language of conversion and becoming like a child is found in Matthew 18:3 (see also the parallel Mark 10:15), which many feel is a different, independent version of the same basic saying as John records in 3:3,5.[17] That John is using a traditional

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[15] Borgen 1987a:112-115, who also notes *Exod.Rab.*3:15; 30:5; and Tanchuma Shemoth 18. Pryor notes the use of the language of 'becoming like a child' in connection with proselytes in the rabbinic corpus, and feels that such usage underlies the traditional saying that John takes up here (Pryor 1991a:93). Barrett 1978:206 regards such rabbinic parallels as these, and those which refer to proselytes as 'like a newborn child', as irrelevant, since they refer to "the legal status of the convert" (followed by Witherington 1995:95). However, Sjöberg is surely right to point out that these rabbinic texts are metaphors for the fresh start, the completely new beginning, which is the experience of the proselyte (1951:45-55,59f). The idiom was perhaps connected with both proselytes in general and Israel at Sinai from the very beginning, since the proselyte re-enacted Israel's exodus/Sinai experience, and Israel at Sinai accepted Torah and became a 'proselyte'.

[16] On the parallels see the helpful summary in Borgen 1996b:105, and also Sjöberg 1951:41-85. See too Borgen 1987a:114; 1996b:106 for the argument that these later rabbinic traditions, taken together with the Philonic evidence, show Philo to be dependent on earlier Jewish exegetical traditions.

[17] So e.g. Dodd 1963:358f; Brown 1966:144; Sanders 1968:123f; Lindars 1972:150; Barrett 1978:206; Michaels 1989:55; Ashton 1991:183f; Dunn 1991c:370; Painter 1991:161f; Pryor 1991a; 1992:19; Létourneau 1993:397-399.

saying seems probable, particularly in view of the fact that this is the only occurrence of the typical Synoptic expression 'kingdom of God' in John, while the immediate context of the saying in the Synoptics contains the only occurrence there of the typical Johannine idiom, 'eternal life'.[18]

Perhaps even in the period prior to John, this saying had already been met with the objection that Israel had already received a new birth and been given access to heavenly things at Sinai.[19] That the Matthean form of this traditional saying was intended to recall Mosaic-Sinai traditions is very plausible, given Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as a 'new Moses'.[20] Yet already in the earlier version of the saying in Mark 10:15, the saying is sandwiched between discussions of the teaching of Moses concerning divorce, and of the relationship between keeping Torah and inheriting eternal life/entering the kingdom of God. The other images which are used here in John, namely water, Spirit and the imagery of rebirth or new creation, are elsewhere in early Christian literature connected not only with conversion to or initiation into Christianity, but also with Exodus/Sinai imagery and motifs.[21] There is, at any rate, clear evidence that the

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[18] Cf. Morgen 1993:73f.

[19] Note also Deut. 30:12, a passage which was taken up and used by the early Christians (e.g. Rom. 10:5-8).

[20] Cf. Allison 1993. See also Moses 1996:161-207.

[21] As e.g. in 1 Cor.10:1-11. Cf. also Matt. 19:28, where the renewal of all things (παλιγγενεσία) is connected with the question of inheriting eternal life and entering the kingdom of God on the one hand

debate over the respective value of the revelations brought by Jesus and Moses began prior to John; the attempt to link this with the traditional saying that underlies John 3:3 remains highly plausible, but our case will stand even if this traditional saying was not related to this issue prior to John.[22] Nonetheless, as we shall now see, there is other evidence that John is here dependent on earlier Christian traditions, traditions which show an interest in the question of the relationship between Jesus and Moses, particularly in relation to the Sinai events.

Several recent authors have suggested that the grammar and logic of John 3:13 (which will be central to our discussion below) indicates that Jesus was thought to have made an ascent to heaven *already prior to the time that he is speaking to Nicodemus*.[23] That is to say, Jesus was thought to have made an ascent to heaven not only at the end of his life, after the

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(19:16,24), and the twelve apostles as the basis for a new Israel on the other. The baptism of John the Baptist may in itself have carried restoration of Israel connotations, baptism being associated with proselytes, and this combined with the wilderness setting suggesting a restoration or 're-creation' of Israel. Even if baptism is not in mind in John 3:5, there are still close connections with Ezek. 36:25-27, which uses water and spirit imagery in relation to the restoration of Israel. Cf. Lindars 1972:152; Barrett 1978:208f; Grayston 1990:35.

[22] Other places where birth and receipt of revelation or the word of God are connected include 1 Pet. 1:23 and 1 Cor. 15:8. This latter case is significant inasmuch as Paul likens the revelation he received both to birth and to the revelation Moses received on Sinai (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-18). However, such examples are not explicit enough to prove the point. See also the further connections with Mark 10/Matt. 19 noted by Morgen 1993:72f,77-79; Létourneau 1993:399-403. (For the view that John is here dependent directly on the Synoptic Gospels, see Morgen 1992; Létourneau 1993:407-409).

[23] Cf. Bühner 1977:374-399,422-433; Roth 1985:12; Borgen 1987a:107f; Ashton 1991:349-356; M. Smith 1992:294. Borgen's understanding of the prior ascent as a *heavenly installation into office* rather than an ascent to heaven from earth is more problematic. See some of the valid criticisms made in Burkett 1991:34f; cf. too Kanagaraj 1995:161f.

resurrection, but also during the course of his lifetime.[24] The grammar seems to imply this both in its use of the perfect tense ἀναβέβηκεν and through the use of εἰ μὴ ('except'), which seems to suggest that the one who has descended is an exception to the rule and has (already, previously) ascended.[25] Before reaching a conclusion, two alternative interpretations of this evidence need to be considered.

First, it has been suggested that John is making Jesus speak from his own post-resurrection perspective.[26] However, while the occasional insertion by the evangelist of a phrase such as 'and now is' (cf. 4:23; 5:25) may perhaps refer to the present post-resurrection situation of his community, these may also be, like 13:31, assertions that the decisive hour has arrived, even if all is not completely and finally accomplished. It is of course true that the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus represents to a large extent the discussions between the Johannine Christians and Jewish interlocutors in a later period. But given that the denial of

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[24] Note the similarity with the Moses tradition here, which held that Moses ascended on Sinai and also at the end of his life, the latter involving in at least one tradition (recorded in Jude 9) an ascent after death involving, or somewhat akin to a, resurrection. See further Meeks 1967:124,209-211.

[25] Létourneau 1993:171 rightly stresses that the logic of the οὐδεὶς...εἰ μὴ construction "implique que l'on affirme dans la subordonnée d'exception la même chose qui est niée dans la proposition principale." And while he is correct to stress the relationship between this saying and the vision/knowledge of heavenly things (1993:170,173), there is no evidence that a reference to this effect is assumed elliptically in this saying, so that the meaning is "No one has ascended to heaven (and seen heavenly things), except the one who descended, (he has seen them)" (1993:170). This translation faces many of the same difficulties which confront the proposal of Sidebottom discussed below, and thus our interpretation appears to do best justice to the grammar and syntax. *Contra* Zwiep 1997:135, the perfect tense need not necessarily mean 'ascended and is still there'.

[26] So e.g. Hamerton-Kelly 1973:230f; Barrett 1978:213; Nicholson 1983:95f; Painter 1991:210; Pryor 1991b:349f; Zwiep 1997:135. *Contra* Moloney 1978:54.

ascent is a polemic against the ascent of figures, in particular Moses, concerning whom it was claimed by John's opponents that they had ascended to heaven to bring back revelation, this is the meaning which should be given to the verb ἀναβέβηκεν in the exception clause, unless there are very strong indications that such a rendering would be inappropriate.[27]

The additional words ὁ ὢν ἐν τω οὐρανω contained in some manuscripts are regarded as original by some scholars, but may equally represent an awareness of the difficulty which Christians, no longer familiar with the idea of an ascent made by Jesus prior to the resurrection, found in attributing the words in v13 to the earthly Jesus, and an attempt to make them refer to the post-resurrection ascension. If it is a later addition, it must have been inserted relatively early. Nonetheless, Nestle-Aland's decision not to include the phrase seems to be based on a sound judgment as to the relative weight

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[27] Painter 1991:410 n.18; 1992:1878f seeks to alleviate the problem by attributing John 3:13ff to the narrator rather than Jesus. This is not impossible, but faces a major objection, inasmuch as this would be the only example in the Gospels of 'Son of Man' being used by others to describe Jesus, rather than on the lips of Jesus himself. Of course, Acts 7:56 and John 12:34 show that it could be used in this way occasionally. Yet even if Painter is correct and this is a comment by the narrator rather than the words of the Johannine Jesus (in this chapter the two are particularly difficult to distinguish), the grammatical considerations still appear to require the interpretation we are arguing for here, that is to say, the question of whether these words are simply a narrator's comment or are being placed on the lips of Jesus does not affect the grammatical indications that whoever is speaking is thinking of Jesus having ascended in a way akin to what was claimed for Moses by John's opponents.

Pryor 1991b considers that the ascent of the Son of Man is much more central than is descent, so that it is difficult to speak of a 'descent-ascent schema'. However, he does not adequately consider the possibility of a prior ascent to heaven (he takes the reference to be to the exaltation of the risen Jesus). If his view on this latter point is correct, then John 3 could perhaps be included in part 2 of the present work rather than part 3, with the claim of descent defending the exaltation of Jesus to heaven rather than the claim that he is the revealer. Nonetheless, in the view of the present author, the connection between the Son of Man and descent/ascent imagery may be in need of qualification, but cannot ultimately be denied.

of the textual evidence.[28] If this phrase was original, it may be that, as Ashton suggests,[29] it was a Johannine addition to an earlier tradition. In that case John would be abandoning the view that Jesus ascended during his earthly career, and placing the complete focus on descent.[30] At any rate, the structure of the saying appears to confirm both that the latter phrase is not integral to the saying, and that the author intends to contrast the Son of Man with those figures for whom claims of ascent were made. The following structure has been proposed:[31]

καὶ

A οὐδεὶς

B ἀναβέβηκεν

C εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν

εἰ μὴ

C' ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανου

B' καταβάς,

A' ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

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[28] Cf. Moloney 1978:59. See also Nicholson 1983:97f, whose assessment of the evidence is fair and balanced, even though he reaches a different conclusion. See also Painter 1992:1878f.

[29] Ashton 1991:349,354.

[30] It seems quite clear that the Evangelist intended to move the focus from ascent to descent. Cf. Kanagaraj 1995:162. Nonetheless, it is difficult to know with any certainty whether he simply changed the emphasis, or whether he abandoned entirely the idea of Jesus having made an ascent during the course of his earthly life. See further below n.32 and ch.13.

[31] Pryor 1991b:346, following Moloney 1978:56.

This seems quite likely to be correct, as it fits the text admirably and in no way appears forced. We thus see that the Son of Man is directly contrasted with the 'no one': the Son of Man is the exclusive revealer of heavenly things. The basis for his revelation is also contrasted: descent from heaven rather than ascent into heaven. The context and structure suggest that the ascent attributed to the Son of Man is of the same sort as that which is being polemicized against in the case of other figures, rather than a reference to Jesus' post-resurrection ascension.[32]

However, these considerations do not exclude the second alternative translation which we must now consider. Sidebottom has pointed to Revelation 21:27 as an indication of a possible alternative understanding of εἰ μὴ in John 3:13. He writes: "If the former must be translated, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean...but those who are written in the Lamb's book of life", so the latter can be rendered "No one has ascended into heaven but one has descended." And this is the only translation which fits the actual circumstances. The sole and not very satisfactory alternative is to regard the verse as an explanatory comment written in the light of the (later) Ascension, entirely unrelated to the knowledge of τὰ ἐπουράνια

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[32] Context must be given priority in interpretation. Zwiep 1997:135 draws attention to the fact that the only other occurrence of the perfect tense ἀναβέβηκεν in the NT is in John 20:17, where the Johannine Jesus stresses that he 'has not yet ascended'. Here the context clearly refers to the post-resurrection ascension, whereas the context in 3:13 relates to a different sort of ascent. Nonetheless, it may be that John disagrees with his source and no longer holds that Jesus made an ascent akin to that of Moses - at any rate John clearly emphasizes that it is due to *descent* rather than *ascent* that Jesus can reveal what no other can (cf. Painter 1992:1879). John's exact position is difficult to pin down, because his assessment of the ascent tradition we are discussing here is unclear, but at least his basic emphasis seems clear enough. See further ch.13 below.

which is the subject of the discussion with Nicodemus."[33] As we have already seen, the view that the Johannine Jesus is here speaking from the anachronistic perspective of the post-resurrection/ascension church is not the only alternative. Nevertheless, Sidebottom's alleged parallel needs to be considered.

Ashton writes concerning this suggestion by Sidebottom, "The 'parallel' in Rev. 21:27 to which he and, following him, Moloney...appeal actually tells against them. Borgen...rightly compares 6:46; 17:12."[34] Ashton is clearly correct to prefer Borgen's parallels drawn from within John. It must also be observed that Rev. 21:27, like the other examples of this idiom in the New Testament,[35] excludes one group from doing something which a second group does. "None of category X shall enter, but only those of category Y (shall enter)" is the sense of the example from Revelation. If this grammar is applied to John, we get the same result: "No one has ascended into heaven, but only the one who descended (has ascended)."[36] Thus on this second point Ashton once again appears to be correct: the example cited in favour of Sidebottom's rendering in fact discounts it. It is preferable, therefore, on the grounds of both syntax and

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[33] Sidebottom 1961:120f. See too Moloney 1978:55; Hare 1990:86f; Carson 1991:200.

[34] Ashton 1991:350 n.37. See also Coppens 1981:64.

[35] Coppens 1981:63 mentions several other texts which are sometimes appealed to in support of this rendering.

[36] Hare's appeal (1990:87) to Gal. 1:19 as "a similarly inexact use of the exceptive *ei me*" seems clearly to represent the citation of a verse in support of his case which actually favours the rendering he is arguing against (see also Carson 1991:200, who recognizes the difficulty but still attempts to maintain this sort of interpretation). See further the detailed criticisms raised by Nicholson 1983:93-96, whose arguments are not answered by Hare's restatement of Sidebottom's position, since Nicholson's book is not referred to by Hare.

context, to interpret John 3:13 along these lines: No one has ascended to heaven to bring back revelation from there, but the one who descended from heaven - the Son of Man - has ascended to heaven to do just that. Both the claim being denied (ascent to heaven to bring back revelation) and the exception clause (Jesus, the Son of Man, has done what these others have not) suggest that John knows a tradition which claims that Jesus, in comparison with or contrast to Moses,[37] has at some point in the course of his life ascended into heaven and returned.[38]

If we are correct to suggest that John is aware of a tradition which attributed to Jesus a heavenly journey akin to that made by Moses,[39] then the next question is whether there is any evidence for such a view in the pre-Johannine Christian literature available to us.[40] An affirmative answer to this

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[37] John clearly denies that any other figure has ascended, but it need not be assumed that John's source contained a similar denial. Rather this denial is more likely to be the product of the controversy in which John and his opponents were engaged. Earlier in the controversy (see immediately below concerning the traditions John may have been dependent on), it seems that Jesus' *similarity* to Moses was emphasized, whereas here John emphasizes his *superiority*.

[38] This may also be implied by John's reference to 'birth from above', especially if Philo's understanding of Moses' ascent at Sinai as both a 'second birth' and a 'calling above' had a wider currency and/or was known to John, and if, as some have suggested, it is primarily *Jesus* who is thought of as 'born from above' (so e.g. Meeks 1967:298f; 1986:147; Nicholson 1983:81-84). See also our discussion earlier in this chapter.

[39] The Evangelist seems to be working with a tradition here, which he is altering, placing the focus on descent rather than ascent; see further above n.30, n.32 and n.37. A number of statements made by the Johannine Jesus would fit very well within the context of a view of him having ascended to heaven in a way similar to Moses (cf. especially 8:38,40; see further Bühner 1977:375-377).

[40] The only objection raised by Burkett (1991:36f) to Bühner's thesis which affects the present study in any significant way is the question of evidence for Jesus having ascended to heaven or received a prophetic 'call vision'. We hope to show evidence for at least one clear instance in the tradition where an ascent is implicit, namely the transfiguration. Bühner seems to assume (on his 'anabatic-prophetic' model) that the ascent would have taken place at the call of the prophet, which leaves him open to Burkett's criticism at this point; but in connection with the Mosaic typology found in the Gospels and in particular the transfiguration accounts, it should be noted that Moses' call took place at the burning bush, prior to the ascent and receipt of

question has been reached by Fossum,[41] in connection with the narratives in the Synoptic Gospels concerning the transfiguration of Jesus. Chilton appears to have reached a similar conclusion when he writes, "The Transfiguration narrative appears to partake of the visionary milieu of which the Revelation is a representative. Jesus initiates the elect three into the heavenly realm."[42] The parallels between the Synoptic transfiguration accounts and the traditions concerning Moses on Sinai have been discussed on numerous occasions and need only be mentioned briefly here: the high mountain, the cloud and the voice which speaks from it, the radiance of Moses/Jesus, the fear of those who saw, the mention of a special group of three and the reference to six days.[43] However,

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Torah at Sinai, and thus on a Mosaic typology or understanding of Jesus' mission, his call would not necessarily have involved an ascent. Furthermore, the motif of a prophet being taken up to heaven and there identified with a heavenly figure such as the Son of Man, which is central to Bühner's thesis (1977:385-399), is of questionable relevance to the study of John's ascent-descent schema. Although the later 3 Enoch may have interpreted 1 Enoch in this way (which is an understandable interpretation of the present state of the text of 1 Enoch), we cannot be sure that this belief underlies 1 Enoch and the Fourth Gospel, rather than having resulted much later from a misunderstanding of 1 Enoch. It is more likely either that 'son of man' in 1 En. 71:14 is a generic use, which does not intend to identify Enoch with '*that* son of man' (Isaac 1983:50), or that chapter 71 is a later addition to the book (Collins 1984:151-153, who discusses the various possibilities in some detail), since other parts of the work seem to distinguish clearly between Enoch and 'that son of man' (1 Enoch 70:1; see the discussion of this passage in Collins 1984:150ff). The other texts Bühner adduces (1977:388-391) are not evidence for this conceptuality, unless read in light of 1 Enoch interpreted in the way he proposes. Thus the present study, while agreeing with Bühner on the question of ascent, does not reach the conclusion that John regards Jesus as having ascended to be identified with the heavenly 'Son of Man'.

[41] Fossum 1995. See also M. Smith 1980:41f; 1981:420f.

[42] Chilton 1981:121.

[43] Chilton 1981:120f; Stegner 1989:86-93; Marcus 1992:81-84; Allison 1993:243-248; Moses 1996:43f,53f,84. Cf. also Boismard 1953:168f; Davies 1964:50; Kooy 1978:66f. Matthew's version (17:1-13) is perhaps the most reminiscent of the Mosaic tradition, but such allusions and imagery are present already in Mark, and thus already in our earliest evidence this story was related to Moses/Sinai typology. Chilton correctly writes, "The relationship between the Sinai scene and the transfiguration appears to have been fully appreciated by all three Synoptic evangelists...At the level of tradition and redaction, it is beyond reasonable doubt that the Transfiguration is fundamentally a

there is no explicit mention of an ascent to heaven, and we must thus consider the possible evidence that a heavenly journey of some sort is implied in the narrative.

Among the features of the transfiguration stories which are noted by Fossum and Chilton as having parallels in Jewish traditions of heavenly journeys are the following:

(1) Mountains were frequently the starting places for ascent to heaven. This is not only true of the Moses-Sinai traditions: in ancient mythological worldviews in general, mountains were considered close to heaven, and were often regarded as meeting places between heaven and earth.[44]

(2) The transformation of a figure's clothing and/or appearance, including becoming luminous, is frequently among the results of the ascents described in Jewish sources.[45]

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visionary representation of the Sinai motif of Exod.24" (Chilton 1981:121f). On the relationship between Mark's account and those of Matthew and Luke, cf. Fossum 1995:78,84f, who suggests the possibility that "Matthew and Luke have filled out Mark's story of Jesus' ascent and transformation with traditional elements"; Moses 1996:45-48 (plus his detailed redaction-critical comparison of Mark's and Matthew's versions on pp.114-160). The voice from the cloud also seems to echo the command to heed the prophet like Moses in Deut.18:15 (So e.g. Davies 1964:50; Hill 1972:268; Moses 1996:145). D'Angelo 1979:192 n.85 rightly interprets the transfiguration against a Mosaic background, but reads too 'high' a christology into the Markan version when she suggests that already in Mark Jesus is thought of as the one who appeared to Moses and Elijah on the mountain. This interpretation was given to the narrative in the subsequent centuries, and is very possibly the way John himself read the narrative, but it seems unlikely that the very earliest readers of Mark would have understood his narrative in that way. Cf. the more balanced interpretation of Marcus 1992:80-93.

[44] Fossum 1995:72-76. On this as a typical feature in post-Biblical apocalyptic works describing ascent to heaven see Dean-Otting 1984:267-269. Chilton 1981:120 notes the similarity with the experience of the apocalyptic visionary in Rev. 21:10.

[45] Fossum 1995:82-86. Chilton 1981:120 notes Rev. 3:5,18; 4:4 as relevant parallels. The ascent is also closely connected with the commissioning of the one who ascends as God's agent (cf. Dean-Otting 1984:278f).

(3) The appearance of two heavenly figures to accompany the one who is ascending is a standard feature of ascent accounts.[46]

(4) There is some evidence for a six-day period preceding an ascent or the receipt of a revelation as a recurrent motif in some Jewish literature.[47]

(5) The statement by Peter that 'it is good for us to be here' may imply a realization that he has entered a heavenly realm. The language of 'tabernacles/dwellings' is also sometimes connected with heavenly existence.[48]

These features on their own may appear inconclusive, but combined with the Moses-Sinai imagery which we have already noted to be present in the passage, and the widespread tradition that Moses ascended to heaven on Sinai,[49] it seems quite probable that the transfiguration tradition intended to present Jesus as having made a 'heavenly ascent' of some sort.[50]

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[46] Fossum 1995:88f. See also Sabbe 1991:70 on this as a feature of apocalyptic writings. Davies 1958:40 notes that Luke uses the phrase καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο both in the transfiguration account (Luke 9:30) and the account of the post-resurrection ascension (Acts 1:10). See further the table of parallels in Davies 1958:186.

[47] Fossum 1995:79-82.

[48] Fossum 1995:89-91. See also Chilton 1981:118,121, who also notes the motif of fear in visionary experiences as important here.

[49] Cf. further Meeks 1967:122-125,156-159,205-209,241-244.

[50] It should also be noted that in much of the literature which provides evidence of belief in Moses' ascent to heaven, the ascent is implied or assumed rather than explicitly asserted or argued for (as Allison 1993:177 notes when he writes that "In Philo and Exodus Rabbah one has to read a bit between the lines"). Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 12.1 says that Moses went down again "to the place where the light of the sun and moon is", without having previously said that he ascended (although he does make an explicit statement later, in 13:7f). See also Meeks 1967:158, who notes that 2 Baruch 4:2-7 describes the things revealed to Moses in terms very close to the description of the revelation to Enoch in 1 Enoch 17-36, but without ever stating that Moses ascended. See also Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge* 68-89; *b.* Shab.

This connects in an obvious way with John 3, where the relationship between Jesus and Moses and the issue of ascent are also to the fore. It is not surprising that A. Moses, in studying the Matthean transfiguration account, saw a close connection between John 3:13 and the tradition he was studying.[51]

Although John does not record the transfiguration of Jesus, it has nonetheless been suggested that he knew this tradition. The verse which has been the focus of most attention in this regard is John 1:14, where the Evangelist affirms that "we beheld his glory." Luke 9:32 explicitly describes the transfiguration as a vision of Jesus' *glory*.[52] Both in the transfiguration narratives and in John 1:14, Jesus is affirmed as God's "beloved/only Son."[53] The language of tabernacles is also present in both, as is imagery evocative of Moses on Sinai.[54] Brown, having reviewed all this evidence, cautiously affirms that "there is much to recommend the suggestion that 14c,d is an echo of the Transfiguration."[55]

In addition, the centrality of the designation of Jesus as 'Son of Man' in John 3:13 is another possible connection

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88b. The fact that the Sinai accounts were so widely interpreted in this way, in spite of the lack of explicit reference to the ascent of Moses into heaven, indicates that allusions to the narratives of Moses on Sinai may have been sufficient to suggest that the transfiguration of Jesus be interpreted in a similar manner. See also the parallels between the Transfiguration account and the account of Jesus' post-resurrection ascension in Davies 1958:39-41,186.

[51] Moses 1996:221-224.

[52] On glory as a key theme in ascent narratives see further Dean-Otting 1984:280-284,286-288.

[53] Boismard 1953:71f; Moses 1996:214-221.

[54] Boismard 1953:169.

[55] Brown 1966:34. See also Glasson 1963:65-73; Kooy 1978.

between John and the transfiguration accounts. Although many aspects of A. Moses' attempt to relate Matthew's transfiguration account to the imagery of Daniel 7 seem either vague or forced, he rightly notes that (in Matthew more emphatically, but already in Mark) the transfiguration story is bracketed on both sides by references to the 'Son of Man.'[56] Matthew and the other Synoptic Evangelists obviously do not make as much of this as John does, but it certainly seems possible that John felt able to relate the traditions about the Son of Man to the question of ascent in the way that he did because the two had already been brought into close proximity in the traditions he inherited.[57] One of the 'Son of Man' sayings recorded in close proximity to the transfiguration accounts in the Synoptics is the first passion prediction, and this is perhaps significant in view of the fact that the first saying which asserts that 'the Son of Man must be lifted up' occurs in this section of John (3:14). Also noteworthy is the centrality of the language of 'seeing the kingdom of God', which is also closely connected with the transfiguration (Mark 9:1 and parallels).[58]

We have thus seen evidence that: (1) John is concerned here with polemic against claims that Moses ascended to heaven; (2) John has inherited a tradition which asserts or suggests that Jesus ascended to heaven; (3) the Synoptic transfiguration

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[56] Moses 1996:91-99. For suggested parallels with Daniel see Sabbe 1991:65-77; Moses 1996:100-113; of these the most convincing are the points of contact with Dan.10 noted by Sabbe 1991:66f. On close connections between Luke's account of the transfiguration and the figure of the Son of Man, see Trites 1987:80.

[57] See further immediately below, and also 2.2.2 above.

[58] Cf. Chilton 1981:123.

accounts imply that Jesus ascended to heaven and relate this to the imagery of Moses at Sinai. All in all, then, it seems quite plausible to suggest that John is dependent here on some form of transfiguration account,[59] which had already been related to the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses.[60] John is thus addressing the same issue as these earlier texts, the relationship between Jesus and Moses, but in a more explicit and developed way. By John's time, the focus had come to be more explicitly on the question of Jesus' *qualifications* to reveal God as compared with Moses (cf. John 9:29).[61] Earlier it had been sufficient to allude to similarities and differences between Jesus and Moses, whereas by the time John wrote the debates over this issue had progressed, and John had to address the same basic issue, but more explicitly and directly.

10.3 The Johannine Response

The Fourth Evangelist's response is two-pronged. He argues that, on the one hand, no one has ever ascended to heaven to

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[59] We will suggest possible reasons why John did not include an account of the transfiguration in his Gospel below (pp.242f). For further discussion of John's possible knowledge of such traditions see Kooy 1978; Moses 1996:214-224.

[60] Cf. further Stegner 1989:83-103; Marcus 1992:93.

[61] John 9 is discussed in ch.12 below. It is unclear why Nicholson, having recognized that Jesus is contrasted with Moses and other figures for whom the claim of an ascent was made (1983:91f), and that "The primary point of 3:13 is that no one has ascended and descended, but one person, the Son of Man, has descended and ascended" (1983:93), he fails to relate the two directly to one another. The claims made for Moses and for other figures related first and foremost to the role and function of revealer of God and/or heavenly things, and it is thus likely that Jesus' uniqueness is emphasized here because it sets him apart from all other revealers, and thus makes his revelation superior to theirs. It would thus seem that it is best to regard the claim which is made here for Jesus as concerning both the uniqueness of his status and the uniqueness of the revelation brought by him. (See also Davies 1992:71f, who notes that there are similarities and differences between the use of ascent/descent language for Moses and for Jesus. Moses ascends the mountain and descends again, whereas Jesus descends from heaven and ascends again, but both descend in order to make God known).

bring back revelation, whether Moses, Enoch or others, while on the other hand, the one who came down from heaven has brought such heavenly knowledge. "Verse 13 rejects all other heavenly journeys...and reserves the claim to heavenly knowledge exclusively for Jesus."[62] As we have already seen, John has probably inherited a tradition which *compared* Jesus' experience on a mountain with that of Moses. However, the ascent of Moses was widely accepted, whereas that of Jesus was difficult to demonstrate to those who were not already believers. John had to find some way of demonstrating the *superiority* of Jesus' qualifications to be the revealer, over against those of Moses.

In discussing this passage in John, commentators frequently note that a denial of heavenly ascent is also found in the Babylonian Talmud, in a saying attributed to R. Jose b. Halaphta: "The presence of God did not descend to earth, nor did Moses and Elijah ascend on high."[63] This was certainly not the position of the majority of rabbis, who seem to have accepted the possibility of heavenly ascent, both in connection with Moses and also in the present day for Merkabah mystics. Nonetheless, there is some evidence from sources from close to the time of John which suggest that there may have been a hesitancy in some Jewish circles, even in the first century, to believe that any human figure had ascended to heaven and either seen God or entered the very presence of God.[64] There was a

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[62] Grese 1988:687. See also Moloney 1978:54; Borgen 1996b:103.

[63] *b.* Suk. 5a.

[64] Although the talmudic tradition cited, which raises such concerns explicitly, is obviously of a date much later than John, we have seen evidence that may suggest that there was concern in some circles, even in the first century, about claiming that a human being ascended to heaven to be enthroned there (esp. in chs. 3 and 7 above). Thus it is not impossible that other ideas of heavenly ascent, while generally accepted, had been objected to by some, perhaps a small minority, even

tension in Jewish tradition between the belief that God could not be seen and the belief that he had been seen and made known. The Fourth Evangelist is not ruling out the possibility of 'seeing/entering the kingdom of God' or of knowing heavenly things. Rather, he is emphasizing one of these two dialectical strands, with the aim of making an exclusive claim for Jesus as revealer. What is being denied is not so much any claim to have received revelation apart from Jesus, as the possibility of a revelation superior to that of Jesus.[65] The force of this claim is only felt when it is coupled with the second prong of the Johannine defence.

In this chapter, John moves from a discussion of issues related to Moses and/or the Prophet-like-Moses, to the Son of Man. Since, as Martyn points out, this pattern occurs several times in the Gospel, of which this is the first, the pattern must certainly be significant.[66] John is using the Son of Man category he has inherited to address the issues raised by the debate over Jesus' relation to Moses, in ways that we shall now consider.

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as early as John's time (cf. esp. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.326). Barrett (1978:212) relates this to the many early Jewish texts which express caution about mysticism and skepticism about human claims to know or understand heavenly things (cf. e.g. Prov. 30:4; 4 Ezra 4:10f). If such concerns existed in John's time, then it may be that John was appealing to the position of some Jews or Jewish authorities over against others, in much the way Paul appeals to the Pharisaic position over against the Sadducean in Acts 23:6-10.

[65] John can reject the claim that Moses or any other ascended to heaven, since the Sinai narratives nowhere explicitly state that Moses ascended. Even in the case of Enoch and Elijah, it could be argued that they did not ascend to the highest heavens, to really have access to God and heavenly things in the fullest sense; and it could be further pointed out that at any rate they are not said in the scriptural accounts to have returned with revelation (John may not have denied the possibility of some sort of postmortem unidirectional ascent even for others).

[66] Martyn 1979:131-134. See also below, pp.267,274 (and also ch.13), in relation to a similar pattern in John 9.

Whereas it could be denied that any human figure, ancient or contemporary, had in fact ascended to heaven (or at least to the highest heaven, the very presence of God), what could not be denied by Jews who accepted the authority of the book of Daniel was that a particular human or human-like figure was, had been or could be in heaven in the presence of God. The '(one like a) son of man' in Daniel 7 appears to have been understood by many Jews - at least towards the end of the first century if not earlier - as a messianic figure, as is clearly the case in 1 Enoch and IV Ezra, as well as in at least some streams of the later rabbinic tradition.[67] In the case of the Similitudes in particular, this messianic figure is described in the language of pre-existence, as a means of expressing his eternal place in the plan of God.[68] As we have already noted, the Fourth Evangelist appears to be the first to draw out from this tradition the literal implications which he does, namely that the Son of Man, because he pre-existed in heaven, can reveal the heavenly things which he saw there.[69] The first assertion in the Gospel of the pre-existence of Jesus as Son of Man occurs in the present context (John 3:13), and may be expected to shed light on precisely why this development took place.

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[67] Cf. especially 1 Enoch 37-71; IV Ezra 13; also the later b. Sanh. 38b; 98a; Hag. 14a. Once again it must be stressed that our concern is not to demonstrate that such an understanding of Daniel 7 is pre-Christian, but pre-Johannine. It is very likely that at least some Jews interpreted Daniel 7 in messianic terms even before the first century; it is certain that towards the end of the first century a number of different authors espouse this view. See further Dunn 1989:72, and n.71 below.

[68] See 2.2.2 above.

[69] Again see further 2.2.2 above; also McGrath 1998a:45f.

The Fourth Evangelist is here developing traditional motifs in order to respond to Jewish objections. 'The Jews' regarded the revelation brought by Moses as sufficient, and thus felt they had no need for Jesus' revelation, which at any rate they found it difficult to verify as being of divine origin.[70] In this context, the Fourth Evangelist was able to appeal to the view of at least some of his Jewish contemporaries that the Son of Man is the Messiah (a human figure),[71] and the Christian view that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of Man.[72] On the basis of these traditions, which had also begun to use pre-existence language, the Evangelist was able to draw the conclusion that, as one who pre-existed in heaven, Jesus (the Son of Man) was superior to all others for whom claims had been made of heavenly journeys and revelations: they had not truly made such journeys, but even if they had, their fleeting visits would be nothing in comparison to the revelation which could be brought by one who had dwelt in heaven before appearing on earth.

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[70] See the explicit statement to this effect in John 9:29.

[71] Dunn is rightly cautious about using the Similitudes of Enoch, IV Ezra and/or the rabbinic tradition as evidence for Jewish thought in *pre-Christian* times (1989:75-82). However, our interest is not in pre-Christian Jewish thought, but merely pre-*Johannine*, and in response to this question the concurrence of 1 Enoch and IV Ezra, which are temporally close to the Fourth Gospel, together with the rabbinic evidence, makes it seem likely that by John's time not only Christians but many Jews as well would have understood the Danielic 'son of man' to be a messianic figure.

[72] Crossan 1991:238-259 concludes that the apocalyptic use of 'son of man' does not stem from the historical Jesus, but nonetheless the identification at the very least arose very early, and is quite widespread (1991:255). See too Sanders 1985:142-146, who has a higher estimation of the authenticity of at least some of these sayings; at any rate, he too notes that they are very early and widespread. There is therefore no reason to think that the Fourth Evangelist, when he uses the designation, is not firmly linked to earlier Christian usage. See also Higgins 1964:153,157-171.

Our discussion thus far suggests a plausible reason why the Fourth Evangelist, who emphasizes throughout his Gospel the glory of Jesus, has not included an account of the transfiguration, in spite of the fact that he probably knew this tradition. The usual reason proposed by scholars is that John omitted it in order to present the whole of Jesus' ministry as a revelation of glory,[73] a glory which was beheld by all of Jesus' followers and not simply a small elite circle. This is very probably correct, but a further and more pressing reason would seem to have been the debates over Jesus' relationship to Moses: Jesus does not reveal God on the basis of such heavenly visits, but rather on the basis of the descent of the Son of Man, who knows heavenly things because of his preexistence in heaven. It is not entirely clear whether John still maintained that Jesus ascended to heaven and returned, or whether he has abandoned this view in order to place full weight on the descent;[74] the latter seems more probable,[75] but in either case, John is emphasizing the descent of the heavenly preexistent one, over against ascent, as the basis of Jesus' revelation. John's emphasis on descent over ascent follows the logic implicit in the Jesus tradition itself: the fundamental event in the revelation given to, in and through Jesus was not the transfiguration (and any ascent connected with it), but the earlier baptism, when Jesus was empowered and indwelt by the Spirit, who in John's view became completely united with

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[73] So e.g. Sanders 1968:82; Kooy 1978:65f,72.

[74] In which case Ashton 1991:354f would be correct in his suggestion that John 3:13 contains overtones of an earlier meaning which the Evangelist did not continue to hold.

[75] Cf. above n.30, n.32, n.37 and n.39; also our discussion in ch.13 below.

Jesus.[76] At the very least, it provided a firm basis in the tradition for the view that descent precedes ascent in the case of Jesus.[77]

The Evangelist's development of the tradition has a number of striking implications, which later christology was left to wrestle with. Of these the most obvious and most difficult is the apparent implication that not simply God's Word, but *Jesus* the Messiah as a personal individual, pre-existed in some sense. Of course, this may in fact be a misreading of John, but a decision on this matter will have to await our later discussion of the coherence of the various images and ideas which John uses in his legitimation. An assessment of how the pre-existence of the Son of Man relates to the pre-existence of the Logos will also have to await this later discussion.[78] However, it seems justified to suggest that the Johannine emphasis on preexistence and descent over any claim to ascent, whether before or after the resurrection, was a key factor which shaped one of the fundamental emphases of subsequent christology, and that John has presented Jesus in these terms in order to legitimate his christological beliefs.

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[76] See our discussions above, esp. 7.3.2. See too Boismard 1988:78f; Morgan 1993:59-61 on possible allusions to Wisdom language here (and also Kanagaraj 1995:163-166), and Morgan 1993:76f on connections with Philo's exegesis of Exodus. On the relationship between the concepts of Word, Wisdom and Spirit, see above 2.2.1.

[77] Another reason for omitting the transfiguration account is the Johannine view of Jesus not as like Moses on Sinai, but the incarnation of the one who spoke to Moses on Sinai. See 9.3 above.

[78] Below, 15.2.

10.4 Summary

In this section we have once again seen John to be taking part in the ongoing debate over an issue which arose earlier, the relationship between Jesus and Moses, here specifically considered in terms of their respective qualifications to reveal heavenly things. John appears to be dependent on earlier streams of tradition, in particular one which presented Jesus on the mountain as having been transfigured in the same way as Moses, due to a similar experience of ascent into heaven. The traditions concerning the revelation at Sinai and Moses' ascent to heaven had thus been brought by Jewish opponents into comparison with the claims which Christians were making for Jesus. The conclusion which these opponents reached was that one could be certain of Moses' qualifications and of the revelation which he brought in a way that one could not be sure of the parallel claims made by Christians concerning Jesus.

In response, John takes up the traditional chronology of the events in the life of Jesus, together with traditions concerning the Son of Man in both Christianity in Judaism. On the basis of these, John drew the conclusion that Jesus' revelation was not based on an ascent to heaven, but on the descent of one who had preexisted in heaven. John goes so far as to claim that no one had in fact ascended to heaven in order to bring back knowledge of heavenly things, except for the one whose revelation was based not on the ascent of a human being into heaven, but on the descent of one who preexisted in heaven to tell of what he saw and experienced there. This is clearly a significant development, but from the perspective of the Fourth Evangelist, this was probably felt to be simply drawing out the

implications of the traditions which he inherited. Earlier tradition had presented the descent of the Spirit on Jesus, and had referred to Jesus as 'Son of Man', a designation which contemporary literature was associating with the language of preexistence. However, no one had previously suggested that the Son of Man would come and tell about what he saw in heaven: preexistence language seems to have primarily been a metaphor for predestination or having a place in the eternal purposes of God.[79] John was apparently the first to draw these sorts of conclusions from the depiction of Jesus in this way, and it seems quite likely that he did this because of his need to defend or legitimate Jesus' qualifications to reveal God. The debate over this issue provoked him to draw out the implications of the traditions he inherited, resulting in significant developments to them.

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[79] It is impossible to determine with any certainty how a first-century Jew would have answered the question whether he or she distinguished two types of pre-existence, or whether he or she would say that the Son of Man did or did not 'really' pre-exist. The point is that the use of pre-existence language in reference to the Son of Man prior to John did not lead to the drawing of the sort of implications that John drew. It emphasized the figure's importance and place in God's plan from the beginning, and not something other than that. On 'real' and 'ideal' preexistence in early Judaism see further Hamerton-Kelly 1973:1-21.

11.2 The Focus of the Conflict

11.2.1 The Key Concerns

The focal point of the narrative, which provides its starting point and most of its imagery, is the Jewish manna tradition.[4] The crowd asks Jesus for a miraculous sign which will demonstrate his claims, just as Moses' claims were confirmed by the miracles which he accomplished.[5] The mention of the specific miracle of the provision of *manna* is probably not accidental: There is clear evidence that around the time John wrote his Gospel there was an expectation in at least some Jewish circles of an eschatological provision of manna in the Messianic age.[6] Thus, although 'the Jews' do not ask specifically for bread from heaven, but for a miracle which will prove Jesus' claims just as Moses' claims were proved by miracles, nevertheless the fact that their request for a sign mentions the provision of manna in Moses' time suggests that the issue is whether Jesus is the eschatological redeemer, the

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[4] Cf. Borgen 1965, *passim*.

[5] See our discussion of this theme in relation to John 9 in ch.12 below.

[6] 2 Baruch 29:8 (probably *c*.100 C.E.). See also Sib.Or.3:46ff; *Mekhilta* to Exodus 16:25. See further Dodd 1953:335; Brown 1966:265f; Lindars 1972:255; Barrett 1978:288f; Carson 1991:286. In a much later rabbinic tradition which is frequently cited by scholars in discussing John 6 (*Eccles. Rab.* 1.28), R. Berechiah says in the name of R. Isaac (*c.* 300 C.E.): "As was the first redeemer so is the latter redeemer...as the first redeemer brought down the manna, so also will the latter redeemer bring down the manna." This statement occurs in the context of a comparison between the first redeemer, Moses, and the latter redeemer (the eschatological Messiah or prophet like Moses). This rabbinic tradition in fact mentions three activities which are common to both redeemers: the provision of manna, the provision of water and riding on a donkey, and it is striking that only John of all the Gospels presents Jesus as doing all three of these things (John 6:32-35; 4:10-14; 7:37f; 12:14f). However, the late date of this work prevents certainty about whether Jewish expectations took anything like this form in John's time. Cf. further Beasley-Murray 1992:1858. On the relationship between John 6 and the expectation of a 'prophet like Moses' see further Schnackenburg 1980:19f,24. On the Jewish views of Moses that may lie behind this chapter, see Menken 1996:54-63.

CHAPTER 11

BREAD FROM HEAVEN (JOHN 6)

11.1 Evidence of Legitimation

We may now turn to the next segment of John's Gospel that we will be considering here in Part 3, the bread of life discourse in John 6. John here presents another dialogue between Jesus and 'the Jews'.[1] That the conflict setting of the Johannine community has influenced this text is suggested by the way 'the Jews' respond to what Jesus says: they ask for a miraculous sign (6:30f),[2] and grumble and argue in response to his words (6:41,52). The result is that even many of his disciples turn back from following him (6:66). This may indicate that we have to do here with a later conflict, an inner-Christian one.[3] Nonetheless, the fact that the opponents are here referred to as 'the Jews' suggests that, whoever else the author may have had in mind, the same opponents as in the other passages we have considered are still in view here. These factors, as well as many features of the text which we shall consider below, suggest that the bread of life discourse will be relevant to our present topic.

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[1] Note the similarity in form with other texts reflecting the church-synagogue conversations presented in Martyn 1979:131-133.

[2] Cf. Martyn 1979:114.

[3] We shall return to this point below, 11.4.

one about whom Moses wrote.[7] The question being asked by the crowd is whether Jesus meets the criteria which the Jewish scriptures and traditions lay down for the redeemer, Messiah or prophet like Moses.

The bread of life discourse is frequently read as having a sacramental rather than a christological emphasis. While there is no reason to deny that the imagery used here would have recalled for Christians the Eucharistic meal,[8] to recognize that a particular type of imagery is present in this section of John is not necessarily to determine the chief emphases on which the evangelist wished to focus through his use of that imagery.[9] The dialogue with 'the Jews' may begin with a discussion of food, but this is quickly interpreted in terms of believing on the one whom God has sent (6:29). As in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, which has a very similar form,[10] the conversation is taking place on two levels: Jesus' interlocutors are thinking of some form of very special, but nonetheless earthly, food or drink, whereas Jesus is offering *himself*. The issue is not whether the Christian Eucharist is the bread of life, but whether Jesus himself is the bread of life (6:35,48). The need of 'the Jews', as far as the author of John is concerned, is to believe in Jesus and thereby to receive eternal life (6:40,47). Of course, belief

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[7] Lindars (1972:233f) regards John 6 as a demonstration of the final statement in chapter 5, namely that Moses wrote about Jesus (5:46f).

[8] Beasley-Murray 1987:95 correctly comments on the mention of flesh and blood in this chapter that "it is evident that neither the Evangelist nor the Christian readers could have written or read the saying without conscious reference to the eucharist".

[9] Cf. Dunn 1971:336.

[10] Cf. Brown 1966:267.

in Jesus would involve becoming part of the Christian community, and thus partaking in their communal meals. The point is not that there is no Eucharistic imagery here, but that this imagery is used primarily to make a christological point, namely to present Jesus himself as the true bread from heaven, manna, and bread of life.

The focus on the issue of Jesus' relationship to Moses and the Sinai revelation is also indicated by the use of language similar to that found in 1:18; 3:13; 5:37f. Here John states that "No one has ever seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father" (6:46).[11] This indicates that in this chapter, as in these other passages, one issue which is to the fore is the claim made for Moses/Israel at Sinai to have seen God. This suggests that, once again, John is contrasting aspects of the Moses/Sinai tradition with the claims which he is making for Jesus as revealer.[12]

11.2.2 Relation to Earlier Tradition

The relationship of John 6 to earlier tradition is relatively easy to demonstrate, given the Evangelist's use of a story which has a clear parallel in the Synoptics. So much has been written on the relationship between the Johannine and Synoptic accounts of the feeding of the multitude and the subsequent crossing of the sea that it is unnecessary to discuss the

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[11] The parallel with 1:18 is particularly close. Cf. Theobald 1988:367f.

[12] See further Borgen 1965:148-154 on the links with the Sinai tradition.

parallels in detail here.[13] John is dependent on a tradition known also to Mark and the other Evangelists, and in the view of the present author most likely knows it independently of them.[14]

The important question for our purposes is whether the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses, or of the provision of manna, is connected with this particular narrative not only in John, but already even in the earlier tradition. Stegner feels that it is, and writes, "I believe that the basic symbolism in the Markan account focuses on the Manna tradition."[15] The reasons he gives for this conclusion are not many, but are nonetheless extremely significant. Stegner begins by showing his awareness of the danger of reading John's interpretation of this early Christian tradition into Mark. He notes the need for caution, but also points out that John may well be making explicit what is implicit in Mark (and also presumably the pre-Markan tradition). Mark generally tends to be less explicit in his allusions and symbolism than John does, and thus we should not expect Mark to make a direct and unambiguous comparison between the bread and the manna.[16]

What we do find in Mark are several allusions to the narratives of Israel's wilderness wanderings, which provided the setting for the Exodus manna story. First, there is the

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[13] See e.g. Dodd 1963:196-222; Brown 1966:236-250; Sanders 1968:9f,175-200; Barrett 1978:271; Schnackenburg 1980:20-23; Ruckstuhl 1992:2001-2019; Vouga 1992:261-279; Borgen 1996a:206f.

[14] Cf. Dodd 1963:196-222; Riniker 1990:52f,58f and *passim*.

[15] Stegner 1989:56.

[16] Stegner 1989:57. See also Nineham 1963:179.

organization of the people into hundreds and fifties. This parallels the organization of Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 18:21), and is found again in the Qumran community, who intentionally patterned themselves on Israel in the wilderness.[17] Second, the reference to the crowd as "like sheep without a shepherd" recalls Moses' prayer that God appoint a new leader, so that Israel will not be "as sheep who have no shepherd."[18] Both feeding accounts in Mark are set in a 'wilderness place' (ἔρημον τόπον), which uses the same words as the Greek versions of the Pentateuchal accounts of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.[19] It may also be significant that the feeding is closely connected with the crossing of the sea, which may recall the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in the Exodus tradition.[20] There is also evidence from Paul (1 Cor. 10:3) that at a very early stage the Christian Eucharist was associated with the manna, and since commentators frequently find Eucharistic overtones in the feeding narrative(s), a close connection with the manna tradition would not be surprising.[21] Other additional parallels noted by Allison include the fact that both Mark and the Pentateuch have two accounts (Mark 6:30-44;8:1-10; Exod. 16; Num.11), and the fact

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[17] Cf. 1QS 2:21f; CD 13:1f. See also Stegner 1989:57; Davies 1993:239.

[18] Stegner 1989:58 (citing Num. 27:17). This also suggests that Jesus may be thought of as the leader who replaces Moses. See too Carson 1991:383; also Meeks 1967:196f,202f, 295,307,311-313 on Moses as shepherd in Jewish tradition.

[19] Nineham 1963:178,182. For other possible verbal echoes of the scriptural narratives, see Stegner 1989:63,70; Allison 1993:239.

[20] This may explain why the two narratives became inseparably linked to one another, so that both the Synoptics and John recount the two together.

[21] Stegner 1989:58f. Cf. Nineham 1963:179,183; also Davies 1964:48f.

that the provision of the 'bread' takes place late in the day/in the evening.[22]

In view of all these points of similarity, it seems quite likely that the Markan version of the feeding of the multitude had already associated the events described with the story in the Jewish scriptures of Israel being provided with manna in the wilderness.[23] It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that John is here taking up this earlier tradition about the feeding of the multitude because it already formed part of the early Jewish-Christian discussion of the relationship between Jesus and Moses. The issue of how Jesus compared with Moses, and how his miracles compared with those worked in Moses' day, antedates John, and John is thus addressing an issue which was not unique to his time or his community.

11.3 The Johannine Response

John presents Jesus as the 'true bread from heaven', i.e. the true manna. On one level, this may be John's way of answering the objection that Jesus did not actually provide bread from heaven in the way that some Jews seem to have expected the Messiah, or the prophet like Moses, to do. As far as the Fourth Evangelist is concerned, Jesus did fulfil the expectation of an eschatological return of the manna, because *he himself* was the manna. Further, Jesus' "manna" provides

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[22] Allison 1993:239 further notes that there is even a reference in the later rabbinic writings to Israel having eaten fish in their desert wanderings (Sipre Num 95).

[23] For possible indicators that Matthew understood the story this way see Allison 1993:240-242.

eternal life, whereas the manna which was eaten in the wilderness - and which 'the Jews' continue to expect - does not. John could make such claims on the basis of traditions which he inherited: The traditions concerning Jesus' final meal with his disciples included an identification between Jesus' body and bread.[24] The tradition of Jesus feeding the multitude, which we have already seen to have close links to the motif of God's provision of manna in the wilderness, contains Eucharistic allusions, even in its earliest known form,[25] thus allowing a connection to be made between this narrative, and the identification of Jesus' body with the Eucharistic bread, and hence also with the manna. Also, there were traditions identifying Jesus very closely with God's Wisdom, in contrast with Torah, which is significant since both were linked to the imagery of manna in Jewish tradition.[26] It is probably on the basis of these various but interconnected traditions that John took the step of identifying Jesus as the manna, the bread from heaven. John drew out the implications which he did from the traditions he inherited, at least partially in response to Jewish objections that Jesus could not be the eschatological revealer/redeemer because he had not provided manna.[27]

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[24] Mark 14:22 and parallels. Note also the Passover setting, which also provides a link with the manna traditions.

[25] Mark 6:30-52. Cf. Nineham 1963:179.

[26] On manna and Wisdom/Torah see immediately below. Note also 1 Cor.10:3f, where Christ is identified with the rock that followed Israel in the Wilderness, which some Jewish writings identify as a symbol of Wisdom and which is closely connected to the manna tradition. Cf. Dunn 1989:183f; 1998:279f.

[27] And of course, given the account of a feeding miracle which is provided in the immediate context, there is also the argument that Jesus did miraculously provide bread, even if it did not fall from the heavens, and the failure of 'the Jews' to heed him is due to their failure to

The main thrust of John's portrait only becomes clear when we take into consideration the three-way identification between manna, Wisdom and Torah which is attested in Jewish literature. There can be little doubt that this identification predates John: it already appears to be implied in Deuteronomy 8:3, and is made more explicit in numerous subsequent Jewish writings.[28] Thus John is not only contrasting Jesus with the manna, but is also contrasting him, through his use of Wisdom/Word imagery, with the revelation brought by Moses in the Torah, much as he did in the prologue.[29]

The issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses/Torah was also to the fore in the dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3, where it was addressed in connection with the descent/ascent of the Son of Man, and with the theme of knowledge of heavenly things.[30] It is probably significant that a reference to ascent and an allusion to the descent of the Son of Man are given in the present passage as well, in 6:62. There has been much discussion of and disagreement over the meaning of this verse. The most convincing interpretation in our view is that of Moloney. In his view, the question being asked in John 6:62 is what Jesus must do in order for his

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recognize or acknowledge the signs which Jesus has in fact accomplished. Cf. Martyn 1979:125f.

[28] Cf. Dodd 1953:336; Barrett 1978:288f; Pryor 1992:31. Philo, *Mut.* 260; *Leg. All.* 162,169-176; See also Neh. 9:20; *Mek. Ex.* 13.17; *Ex. Rab.* 25:7. Jos. and Asen. 16 may also indicate that manna was identified with the Jewish Torah/Wisdom (which the proselyte to Judaism must accept), and also referred to as 'bread of life' in connection with the imagery of the tree of life in Genesis. If this work could be shown to predate John, then it would provide an even clearer indication that the whole of his imagery may derive from this background.

[29] See ch.9 above. In addition to the Wisdom parallels, there are also echoes of the description of the Word of God in Isa. 55:1-11. Cf. Burkett 1991:129-134.

[30] Cf. our discussion in ch.10.

revelation as the one who has come down from heaven to be accepted - must he go so far as to ascend to where he was before? Moloney's interpretation is worth quoting at length:

> John is again entering into controversy with the popular idea that the great patriarchs, prophets and especially Moses, had ascended on high to receive the revelation of God, so that they could bring it down to men. John refuses to accept this, as he shows throughout his Gospel that the unique revealer is not one who has "ascended" so that he might "descend" again, bringing the revelation of God with him. The unique revealer is the one who has "come down" from where he was τὸ πρότερον....In 6,60-65 the claims of the Son of Man in vv. 27 and 53 are being doubted and questioned, so Jesus asks his audience what sort of proof they require. Do they want "to see" the Son of Man ascend into heaven for a short while, like Moses, Isaiah, Enoch etc., so that he might return and tell them what he saw? There is no need for Jesus to "ascend" - he has been there τὸ πρότερον. To ask that he ascend is completely to misunderstand his origin. It is because of his origin "with God" that his revelation is true; he has no need to ascend.[31]

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[31] Moloney 1978:122f. It is difficult to see why Kanagaraj 1995:171 objects to this point, but he nonetheless rightly sees *revelation* as to the fore here.

This clearly ties in very well with the overall emphases which we have found to be important throughout the Fourth Gospel.[32] Nonetheless, Moloney does insufficient justice to the fact that, although Jesus' revelation is based on descent rather than ascent, nonetheless Jesus *will* ascend when he returns to the Father, and this exaltation will confirm his revelation, precisely as a vindication of the one whose origin is in heaven, and who therefore has no need to ascend in order to bring back knowledge of heavenly secrets.[33]

John 6 may be said to combine the two key images which John has used prior to this in his Gospel to legitimate his view of the relationship between Jesus and Moses: Wisdom and Son of Man. Discussion of the question of how Wisdom relates to the Son of Man we must once again postpone until a later chapter.[34] But we may note briefly that John identifies Jesus both as the true bread from heaven, the bread of life (6:35,48), and also the source of this food which gives eternal life (6:27; presumably in unity with his Father, since in 6:32f the Father gives the bread, which is Jesus). Jesus seems to be both the giver and the gift! Vermes has suggested that this may be connected with a rabbinic tradition which

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[32] This would appear to suggest that, although in 3:13 there is a reference to an ascent of this sort (see our discussion above, pp.211f), in fact John no longer has any need to retain belief in such an ascent, because Jesus reveals God due to a prior descent.

[33] There may be an element of Johannine irony here: those who recognize that his origins are in heaven have no need to see him ascend in order to learn of heavenly things, and yet they *will* see his identity confirmed when he returns to the Father; those who refuse to recognize him as one whose origin is in heaven will also object to the idea that he has ascended to heaven (cf. our discussion of the controversy over Jesus' exalted status in chs. 3 and 7 above).

[34] Cf. 15.2 below. The fact that both are said to descend makes this an important but difficult question.

identified Moses with the bread from heaven,[35] but given the late date of the work cited and the lack of attestation for the idea in any earlier source, no argument can be made for John's dependence on such ideas. For our present purposes, it is sufficient that we have seen that the discourse concerning the bread of life in John 6 confirms what we have already suggested in connection with the prologue and the dialogue with Nicodemus: John made creative use of traditions concerning Jesus as Wisdom and Son of Man in order to answer Jewish objections to his christological claims, in order to legitimate Jesus' qualifications not only to reveal God, but to do so in a way that none other, not even Moses, was able to. We shall return later to the question of whether the developments that arose out of these conflicts were formed by John into a coherent and unified christological portrait of Jesus.[36]

11.4 John 6 and Inner-Christian Conflict

The motifs used here echo those used elsewhere in John to respond to the issue of the relation between Jesus and Moses. But what is striking is that, in contrast to the other passages we have considered thus far,[37] we actually find

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[35] Vermes 1969.

[36] Cf. chapter 15 below.

[37] The only possible exception is John 8:31ff, where there is conflict with 'the Jews who believed in him', and here too there is some evidence that conflict about the distinctive Johannine christology has been worked into earlier material (there is a strong objection to Jesus' claim to pre-existence). This may reflect a revision of the Gospel at a later time, perhaps around the time when the Johannine Epistles were written (cf. De Boer 1996:82). Space does not permit us to attempt to discern an earlier version of John to which later material has been added, but it is at least possible that in parts of John 6 and 8 we have evidence of a subsequent revision of the Gospel in order to apply it to new issues.

evidence in John 6 of conflict *about the distinctive Johannine developments*. In other words, John 6 records not only the developments which resulted from the conflict with the synagogue, but also the further conflicts which resulted from those developments. Here the heavenly origin claimed for the Son of Man does provoke a direct, negative response. This is very possibly to be due to the fact that, as Lindars suggests, John 6 was added to the Fourth Gospel after much of the earlier material had already been produced.[38] The difference in content suggests this, but an even clearer indication of this is the way John 6 clearly interrupts the continuity between ch. 5 and ch. 7.[39] Further, the result which follows from the distinctive Johannine developments is not simply further conflict with 'the Jews', but also that some of Jesus' own disciples turn back and no longer follow him, a feature which is found almost nowhere in John apart from in this passage.[40] It thus seems that, whatever its literary history, this part of John gives us insight into the 'aftermath' of Johannine legitimation, and it is thus worth reflecting at least briefly on this point.[41]

The claim that Jesus is the bread of life which came down from heaven is found objectionable, since Jesus is clearly 'the Son of Joseph' (6:41); so is the demand that

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[38] Lindars 1972:50. Cp. Painter 1991:216,240f, who regards only the latter part of ch.6 as later than the majority of the Johannine controversy material. In our view, it seems clear both that the majority of John 6 reflects conflict with 'the Jews', and also that the story has been reshaped so as to address later, inner-Christian debates, and in that form has been inserted between John 5 and 7.

[39] Cf. Lindars 1972:277f.

[40] The exception once again being John 8 (see n.37 above).

[41] See also on this subject Anderson 1996:218.

people eat his flesh (6:52). Caution must be exercised here for two reasons. One is that the Johannine motif of *misunderstanding* is present: what Jesus' interlocutors take literally should in fact be given some form of 'spiritual' interpretation (6:63). The other is that the imagery of the complaints, like the christological imagery applied by the Johannine Jesus to himself, has been influenced by the Exodus narratives. This is true even in 6:52, where Lindars has suggested there is an allusion to the traditions concerning Israel's request for 'meat' (σάρχ) in the wilderness.[42] The whole discourse is an exposition of the Jewish scriptures, and its imagery is derived from there.[43]

We may thus cautiously suggest that the author felt that those Christians who objected to the implications which he was drawing from traditional beliefs, and to the developments he was making, were misunderstanding the scriptures and the teaching of Jesus. In his view, the ascent of the Son of Man demonstrates that he was in fact of heavenly origin (6:62). The only one who could rightly be exalted as Jesus had been was one who was eternally worthy of that status.[44] Yet it was the spirit which was important, and not the flesh. The descent of Jesus did not refer to the descent of a fully-formed, flesh-and-blood human being from heaven; this would obviously have contradicted the natural birth which Jesus was known to

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[42] Lindars 1972:267.

[43] Cf. Borgen 1965:59-98; Lindars 1972:250-253.

[44] Cf. our discussion at various points throughout Part 2.

have had.[45] Rather, the heavenly one who became incarnate in him and spoke through him had descended upon Jesus at his baptism,[46] and become wholly united with him.

Likewise some Jewish Christians may have objected to the language of eating and drinking Jesus' flesh and blood which had become associated with the Christian Eucharist. However, the author does not make any direct reference to the practice of the Eucharist, but rather uses its imagery as a symbol of coming to faith in Jesus. The author responds to these objections by stating that those who cannot grasp Jesus' teaching have not been drawn by God, that is, they have not responded correctly to the teaching of scripture (6:44f).[47] As Rensberger has pointed out in connection with the baptismal imagery in ch.3,[48] distinctive Christian practices would have served a sociological function, clarifying the borders between Christianity and other forms of Judaism. To believe in Jesus meant to join the Christian community, even though that meant rejection by the Jewish leaders and synagogue authorities. Those who reject the Johannine developments, like those who reject Jesus, are portrayed as unwilling to listen to God (and to the voice of the Spirit-Paraclete, as the author will make clear in 14:15-31; 16:5-15). The author emphasizes that the scandal of belief in Jesus is one which has always been

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[45] John shows no knowledge of the doctrine of the virgin birth, but if he was aware of it, the point would still stand: Jesus was born, and thus could not have descended from heaven.

[46] As we have argued in ch.7 above (see also 2.2.1) and in McGrath 1996:4f; 1997c:117f.

[47] For this interpretation see further 14.1.3 below.

[48] Rensberger 1989:54-61. On this imagery see further the excursus in 10.2 above.

attached to obedience to God, and it is this scandal that those who wish to have eternal life must overcome.

11.5 Summary

In John 6, we have once again seen John portraying Christ in comparison/contrast to Moses, and taking up Wisdom and Son of Man imagery in order to legitimate his beliefs concerning Jesus. He thus makes use of a number of traditions in order to portray Jesus as having fulfilled the expectation of an eschatological gift of manna: Jesus himself is the manna, the true bread from heaven, which gives eternal life. John also uses these traditional images to contrast Jesus with Torah. Yet there is an unusual aspect to this part of John: here the focus is not only on the objections of 'the Jews' (to which the Evangelist's distinctive developments were a response), but also on the response which *followed on from those developments*. That is to say, we are allowed a glimpse of the issues which arose subsequently in the community, as a direct result of the developments we have been studying. As we might have expected, the developments were controversial, and were not accepted by all. The means were already in place for the author to legitimate his beliefs against these further conflicts, as many of the features which enabled him to defend his beliefs against Jewish objections could also be turned against Christians who objected. And the imagery he had at his disposal in the tradition also enabled him to legitimate his beliefs in light of the rejection of those beliefs by 'the Jews', and also by some Christians as well.

CHAPTER 12

LEGITIMATING SIGNS (JOHN 9)

12.1 Evidence of Legitimation

John 9 is of great significance for our study, particularly as it was taken by Martyn as the starting point for his interpretation of the Gospel on two levels, one reflecting Jesus and his ministry, the other reflecting the needs and experiences of the Johannine community in its conflict with the Synagogue.[1] In a similar vein Schnackenburg writes, "The transparency with which the narrative reveals the underlying situation of the evangelist and his community is particularly great in John 9...the intention to relate the story to the situation of the evangelist's readers is unmistakable."[2] Meeks follows Bultmann in taking the view that John 9 is to be understood from the perspective of the historical situation of "the relationship between an early Christian group and a hostile Jewish community",[3] as does Pancaro when he writes that

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[1] Martyn 1979:30,39 and *passim*. See also Painter 1991:5,267-274; Brodie 1993:343.

[2] Schnackenburg 1980:238f. See also Dodd 1963:188; Barrett 1978:355.

[3] Meeks 1967:293. In this connection note also Meeks 1967:292f, who writes: "The interrogation is in effect a formal trial, which culminates with the expulsion from the synagogue of the man who was blind but now sees." Meeks suggests (1967:293) that the trial of the man parallels Jesus' trial before Pilate. However, it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that this incident ties in to the motif in John of 'Jesus on Trial' (cf. Harvey 1976:76,85,89,93), with Jesus being tried here *in absentia* through the trial of a man who has become Jesus' disciple (Meeks does not regard the man as a representative of the Christian community, but of "persons still standing within Judaism who have come under the influence of the Christian proclamation" (1967:293), but the fact that the man asks whether the Pharisees wish to become Jesus' disciples *also* (9:27: μὴ *καὶ ὑμεῖς* θέλετε αὐτοῦ μαθηταὶ γενέσθαι;) suggests that the man who had been blind is portrayed by the Evangelist as already a Christian disciple). See further Pancaro 1975:24-26,105f.

"In the persons of the man born blind and the Pharisees, it is the Church and the Synagogue which are coming to grips with each other."[4] There seems to be a large amount of agreement that the conflict and debate which is portrayed in John 9 reflects the debates and conflicts which were taking place between the Johannine Christians and opponents in their local Jewish community. It is thus a logical place to look for evidence of the Evangelist's legitimating activity.

12.2 The Point at Issue in the Conflict

12.2.1 The Focus of the Conflict

John 9 contains one of the clearest and most straightforward examples of the sort of objections which were being raised by the Johannine Christians' Jewish opponents: "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from" (John 9:29). This objection is coupled as well with an expression of the view that Jesus is a sinner and therefore cannot be from God. The point is that, whereas Moses' credentials are indisputable, the Jewish authorities regard Jesus as a lawbreaker, and take this as definitive evidence against his claim to reveal God and speak authoritatively on God's behalf. Martyn comments on 9:28, "The Christ-versus-Moses motif is struck repeatedly in the Gospel, and constitutes...not only the nuclear expression of the synagogue-church rivalry, but also one of the key problems with which John himself wrestled."[5]

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[4] Pancaro 1975:24f.

[5] Martyn 1979:39 n.44.

12.2.2 Relationship to Earlier Tradition

Since we have already touched on this subject in chapter two and in the chapters immediately preceding this one, little needs to be said concerning the evidence that the relationship between Jesus and Moses (and the revelations brought by each) was an issue in pre-Johannine times.[6] This issue obviously has a direct connection to the issue of whether Jesus' teaching is in accord with the Mosaic law, which is to the fore in instances where Jesus is presented, as he is in John 9, as healing on the Sabbath. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is presented as having been accused of breaking the Sabbath on a number of occasions (e.g. Mark 2:23-28; 3:2-4; Luke 13:10-16; 14:1-6).[7]

We may narrow the focus still further, since the healing narrated in this chapter is considered by a number of scholars to be closely related to a similar story attested in the Synoptic tradition, that found in Mark 8:22-26,[8] and/or to the only other detailed Synoptic account of the healing of a blind man, the story of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52, paralleled in Matt. 9:27-31; 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-46).[9] Brown and Schnackenburg feel that the points of contact between John and

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[6] See 2.2.3 above. See also our discussion of other pre-Johannine traditions related to this issue at various other points throughout Part 3.

[7] Note also the traditions of his associating with sinners, which was presumably felt by Jesus' opponents to indicate that he belonged in the same category. See too Harvey 1976:67-77.

[8] So e.g. Moloney 1978:158f; Martyn 1979:24 n.7.

[9] Lindars 1972:341. Martyn 1979:24 n.7 notes these latter passages, but feels that John is closer to the story in Mark 8. Michaels 1989:161, on the other hand, feels that the Johannine account recalls both of the Marcan stories. See also Dodd 1963:185; Haenchen 1984:2:41. Brief mentions of the blind being healed are found in Matt. 11:5 = Luke 7:21f; Matt. 15:29f; 21:14 (noted by Schnackenburg 1980:244; see also the list given by Brown 1966:378).

these alleged Synoptic parallels are not as significant as the differences in setting and the fact that the man in John's narrative was *born* blind.[10] But Barrett is clearly correct to emphasize not only that the story was traditional in some form (a point with which Brown and Schnackenburg also agree),[11] but also that the issues which are to the fore in the Johannine narrative (Sabbath healing and Torah observance; the spiritual blindness of Jesus' hearers; the ministry of Jesus as a test by which all men stand or fall) are also traditional.[12] "John has with unsurpassed artistry and with profound theological insight brought out one of the major themes of the Christian faith."[13]

We must stress again that we are not attempting to argue for John's direct literary dependence upon Mark or any of the Synoptic Gospels.[14] However, the attempt to prove that John does not show direct literary dependence on the other Gospels has frequently led to an overemphasis on the differences between the Johannine and Synoptic narratives of similar incidents. For our purposes, we need only demonstrate that the central motifs and interests of the Johannine narrative did not originate from the Evangelist, but are paralleled in earlier Christian literature. Having made this point, it is nonetheless certainly

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[10] Brown 1966:378f; Schnackenburg 1980:244.

[11] So also Pancaro 1975:17f; Fortna 1988:109f.

[12] Barrett 1978:354f.

[13] Barrett 1978:355. See also Brown 1966:378f, who notes that the "strikingly different details [between John and the alleged Synoptic parallels] are often the very points that serve the Johannine theological interests, and therefore one is hard put to prove scientifically that they were not invented for the sake of pedagogy". The Evangelist certainly wanted to bring out the parallels with the healing account in John 5 (on which see above, ch. 4).

[14] Cf. p. 65 n. 144 above.

striking that in Mark 8:22-32 we have the healing of a blind man, followed immediately by a discussion of whether Jesus is a prophet, or the Messiah, which is subsequently followed by a statement by Jesus interpreting himself through the designation 'Son of Man'.[15] Immediately before this in Mark Jesus refers to having eyes but not seeing (Mark 8:17f), and immediately after (Mark 9:1(ff)) there is material on (spiritual?) seeing, and the transfiguration account which contrasts Jesus with Moses.[16]

For convenience we may set out the parallels between John 9 and Mark 8-9 as follows:

(1) A blind man is healed through the use of spittle and touching (John 9:6; Mark 8:23).
(2) The imagery of the blind seeing and the sighted not seeing is exploited as a symbol of responsiveness to Christ, in connection with reference to the Pharisees (John 9:39-41; Mark 8:15,17f).[17]
(3) The designations prophet, Christ and finally Son of Man are mentioned in that order (John 9:17,22,35; Mark 8:28-31).
(4) The relationship of Jesus to Moses is addressed or alluded to (John 9:28f; Mark 9:2-7).

Thus it is certainly not impossible that John not only had earlier issues in view, but knew as a unit something akin to

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[15] Cf. Schnider 1973:183-187 on Jesus as prophet in this Marcan pericope.

[16] Cf. Schnider 1973:100f, who notes that the command to 'hear him' recalls Deut. 18:15 LXX, which refers to the promised 'prophet like Moses'. See also Moloney 1978:158f.

[17] Note also that in Mark 8:11f the Pharisees ask for a sign; perhaps if John knew this material as a unit he adapted the healing story as a response, providing them with a sign which only showed even more clearly their blindness and hardness of heart.

this Marcan healing narrative and the material which now surrounds it, material which compared Jesus to the prophets of old and discussed the topics of Jesus as Son of Man and of spiritual vision in connection with a comparison between Jesus and Moses. If so, John has reworked the tradition in a number of ways in order to bring certain elements to the foreground of the narrative: he has integrated the discussions of (spiritual) sight into the more immediate context of the healing narrative, so that the narrative functions more clearly as a symbolic illustration of this point; he has placed the healing on a Sabbath, so as to enable the Torah and Moses issues to be addressed more directly through the healing account;[18] he has perhaps also brought in elements from the other Synoptic account of the healing of a blind man, namely that found in Mark 10 and parallels.[19]

At any rate, it is certainly indisputable that John is dependent on earlier tradition here, and that the key motifs (healing a blind man who was sitting and begging, using spittle, healing on a Sabbath) are traditional in some form.[20] This means that the issue which John uses this healing narrative to address is also traditional, one that had arisen prior to the time in which John was written: the relationship

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[18] Cf. also Painter 1991:264.

[19] That John has reworked the traditional stories is not surprising for another reason: the 'partial healing' that takes place at first was regarded as difficult by the other Evangelists, who do not repeat Mark's story. Likewise John, concerned to present Jesus in the best possible light, can be expected to make use of other traditions more suitable for his purpose, which could 'improve' the story while still remaining as faithful as possible to tradition. In fact, it is possible that the Fourth Evangelist has 'spiritualized' this difficult traditional story preserved in Mark, in his narration of the gradual growth of (symbolic) sight as he increasingly recognizes more and more concerning who Jesus is.

[20] Cf. again Barrett 1978:354f.

of Jesus' healing activity, carried out on the Sabbath day, to the prohibitions which the Mosaic law placed on Sabbath activity. John has clearly adapted the tradition he inherited in order to bring certain issues into focus.[21] Regardless whether John is dependent on the Synoptics or on an independent account of the same narrative or narratives that are found in the Synoptics, what is important for our purposes it that it is clear that the issues which he brings to the fore through his use of this traditional story are *equally traditional*: they did not originate with John, but were topics of concern even earlier.

12.3 The Johannine Response

12.3.1 The Signs of Moses

The man who had been born blind represents the standpoint of the Johannine community.[22] He gives priority to the evidently miraculous works which Jesus does, and on the basis of them concludes that Jesus cannot possibly be a sinner, since God would not listen to him in this way if he were.[23] Given the question of the relationship between Jesus and Moses which is to the fore in this part (and others) of John, there is good reason to think that the Johannine emphasis on *signs* reflects the fact that God is said in the Jewish scriptures to have worked signs (LXX has the same Greek word σημεῖον) to confirm

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[21] Cp. Matthew's redaction of the similar tradition in Matt. 9:27-34.

[22] Cf. Martyn 1979:30f, although we would not go so far as to say that this is the portrayal of an actual event in the history of the community; it is better understood as a reflection in narrative form of the type of debates that took place and the issues which were important in them. See too n.3 above.

[23] Cf. Harvey 1976:93f.

that Moses was sent by him.[24] Allison's recent book on Moses typology notes a number of post-Johannine works which explicitly make this connection.[25] While John is by no means the first to compare or contrast Jesus with Moses, he appears to have been the first to make explicit use of the category of 'signs' in this way, and to seek to defend Jesus' authority over against the arguments of a Moses-centred Judaism by appeal to his signs. The Evangelist has thus taken up the tradition of Jesus as a miracle worker,[26] and altered slightly the significance which those miracles had by making them a testimony to the truthfulness of the claims of Jesus as a direct part of a comparison between Jesus and Moses.[27]

In doing so, John could present the rejection of Jesus by the Pharisees on the basis of their alleged loyalty to Moses in an ironic fashion. When the Jewish scriptures narrate how Moses was sent by God to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt, Moses is presented as fearful that the people would not believe him. The signs which God gave him to perform were given to him with an apologetic function, to demonstrate that he was truly sent by God.[28] The Pharisees are unable to prove that Jesus has

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[24] Cf. e.g. Exod. 4:8; 8:23. See also Létourneau 1993:282.

[25] Allison 1993:207. *Acts of Pilate* 5:1; Ps.-Clem. *Recognitions* 1:57; Eusebius, *Dem. Ev.* 3:2.

[26] Cf. Painter 1991:15, who writes, "The major legitimation of Jesus is to be found in the signs that he worked. In this regard Jn does not differ greatly from Mk or Q where the miracles (especially the exorcisms) though not called signs, are taken as evidence of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus".

[27] On John's closeness to tradition in his use of 'legitimating signs' see Painter 1993:20f. On the signs and Mosaic-Prophet/Messianic typologies, see further Nicol 1972:79-90. We will not be seeking to distinguish between different sources with different attitudes to signs in this work. See also our discussion above 2.2.3 and the works cited there.

[28] So rightly Boismard 1988:60.

not accomplished a sign, yet they reject him in spite of that sign on the basis of an appeal to their fidelity to Moses. Yet Moses' status was demonstrated by the accomplishment of signs which, in the view of the Evangelist, were less spectacular than those of Jesus (cf. 9:32: "Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind"). Those who are open to the signs of Jesus and their meaning come to recognize that Jesus' actions have not in fact violated the Sabbath or any other aspect of the Mosaic law. 'The Jews' are thus presented as hardening their hearts towards Jesus, as being unwilling to see, for if they were willing to consider his signs, they would realize where he comes from: from God (9:30-33; also 5:36-40).

John also very likely had in mind the Jewish expectation of a 'prophet like Moses' based on Deuteronomy 18:15,18f. Meeks writes, "The point at issue...in the "trial" in chapter 9...is whether Jesus is the true or the false prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18."[29] Similarly Boismard writes concerning 9:28f:

> Le problème est fort bien posé: il faut maintenant choisir entre Moïse et Jésus, entre Moïse et le prophète semblable à lui, annoncé par Deut 18,18. La mission de Jésus par Dieu est authentifiée par la guérison miraculeuse qu'il vient d'effectuer (vv. 30-32). Plutôt que de le reconnaître, les Juifs sont acculés à nier le miracle, contre toute évidence. Ils ont choisi de rester fidèles au premier Moïse, malgre la promesse faite par

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[29] Meeks 1967:294f.

> Dieu en Deut 18,18 et le miracle qui authentifie la mission de Jésus.[30]

In view of the earlier presentations in the Fourth Gospel of Jesus as the one 'concerning whom Moses wrote' (John 5:46f), and in terms of the signs connected with Moses (John 6:30ff),[31] it seems likely that such ideas are in view here: Jesus is not a false prophet, to be rejected on the basis of fidelity to Moses, but the true prophet, the prophet like Moses, who must be heeded by those who take Moses' teaching as authoritative (Deut. 18:19).

What would John's emphasis on Jesus' fulfilment of this role have added to his legitimation? As we have already noted, Moses was accepted on the basis of signs, and yet while there were some who felt that miracles confirmed the validity of a prophet's message,[32] there was also a warning in the Jewish scriptures (Deut. 13:1-5) that even one who performs signs and miracles is not to be heeded if he leads people away from Yahweh. Thus the issue of miracles or signs was not necessarily decisive. For this reason, John not only presents Jesus as performing a miracle which was felt to be unprecedented, but also presents him as the prophet like Moses. Moses came performing signs which were meant to confirm his commissioning by God, but the people frequently did not listen to him. By presenting Jesus in the way that he does, John turns the tables

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[30] Boismard 1988:25.

[31] On John 6 in connection with this issue see below 14.1.1.

[32] See the texts cited by Nicol 1972:83; Sifre Deut. 13:3; 18:19; *b*.Sanh. 89b, 90a, 98a.

on his opponents: rather than the onus being on the Christians to demonstrate their claims for Jesus, the onus is placed on 'the Jews': will they imitate their forefathers and reject the one whom God has sent to them, even though God has confirmed him through many signs?[33] John's portrait of them as refusing to even accept that a miracle has taken place is intended to show them to be culpable: the reason why Jesus is rejected by the Jews is not the inadequacy of his signs or the character of his teaching, but the refusal of 'the Jews' to listen to him, even as they so often refused to listen to Moses and the later prophets.[34]

12.3.2 Belief in the Son of Man

Also of interest is the question which the Johannine Jesus asks the healed blind man in John 9:35. This saying is particularly striking and undeniably unique,[35] since in none of the Synoptic Gospels or other early Christian literature is Jesus presented as calling for faith in the Son of Man. Even if it were to be suggested that 'Son of Man' is here a circumlocution for 'I',[36] there is still no parallel outside of John: Jesus did call for faith, but he is never presented as asking someone to believe in him in such a direct fashion. The saying does not represent a traditional saying, but rather expresses the church's desire

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[33] This theme comes to the fore in John 6 as well. See 14.1.1, and also ch. 11.

[34] On legitimation and the rejection of Jesus in John see 14.1 below.

[35] Cf. Higgins 1964:155; Martyn 1979:140; Rhea 1990:44.

[36] This has been suggested - in the view of the present author, unconvincingly - by Müller 1991. For an evaluation of this suggestion cf. Painter 1991:285f.

for people to accept that Jesus is the Son of Man. However, there is a similarity with earlier use of the Son of Man title in one respect: Jesus is presented as using 'Son of Man' to carry his own distinctive self-understanding, and thus to correct other understandings associated with other 'titles'.[37] In this chapter Jesus has already been described in a number of different ways, and the subsequent identification of him as Son of Man is at least somewhat similar to the Synoptic usage. However, it is not immediately clear what content the saying bears in contrast to the titles already used.[38] The only feature which gives an indication that John has in mind something of the traditional use of Son of Man imagery is the reference to judgment in v39, although here too the language is distinctly Johannine, and the judgment is not eschatological but present.[39]

This chapter is full of Johannine irony, and it may be that the unusual use of the Son of Man imagery here can be explained in terms of the pointed irony which the Evangelist often uses in polemical contexts. Earlier in the Gospel, the status of Jesus, and his carrying out of divine functions such as judgment, were seen to be a point of controversy in the debate with 'the Jews'.[40] This chapter represents a similar debate, albeit one which focuses on the issue of Jesus' relationship to Moses and Torah rather than his relationship to God. On the one hand, Jesus' identity is borne witness to by

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[37] See esp. Mark 8:29-31; the use in John 1:35-51 in some ways also resembles the use to which the designation is put in 9:35.

[38] Contrast 1:51. Cf. Rhea 1990:47.

[39] Cf. Moloney 1978:152,156.

[40] See Part 2 above, esp. ch. 4.

the signs which he accomplishes, while on the other hand Jesus appears to break the Sabbath, and a lawless man cannot meet with God's approval. In this verse and its immediate context, John calls for faith from one who has begun to recognize that Jesus has been sent by God, and expresses that call for faith in terms of the Son of Man. Jesus opens the eyes of the blind, but those who think they can see become blind (vv39-41): blindness is being exploited here for its metaphorical value as a picture of failure to perceive God's ways. Ironically, the one who recognizes that Jesus is the Son of Man, God's agent, will have no difficulty in accepting that he carries out divine acts, such as judgment or even healing on the Sabbath.[41] Yet those who fail to perceive that he is the Son of Man fail to discern who Jesus is and regard his actions and claims as blasphemous. Thus, in a sense, recognizing Jesus as the Son of Man who is appointed by God as rightful judge saves one from judgment, but failing to recognize him as such leads to judgment.[42]

Finally, we may mention once again the movement from traditional titles relating to Jesus as prophet (like Moses) to an affirmation concerning him as Son of Man.[43] By the time the reader arrived at chapter 9, the designation Son of Man would have carried with it an emphasis on the superior qualifications of Jesus to be the revealer of heavenly things, over against the claims being made for Moses by the opponents of the

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[41] On healing on the Sabbath as a divine activity see above, p.119 n.30.

[42] See our treatment of Jesus as agent and Son of Man in ch.4 above.

[43] This movement occurs in several passages in the Gospel. See Martyn 1979:130-135; Moloney 1978:157.

Johannine Christians.[44] The fact that this chapter would have been read in the light of passages which occur prior to it in the Gospel in its present form, means that the reader would be familiar with material which would have made clear to him or her the relevance to this issue of faith in Jesus as, and recognition of him as, the Son of Man. To recognize Jesus as the Son of Man is to recognize him as the one with authority even to heal on the Sabbath, and with qualifications superior even to those of Moses to reveal heavenly things.[45]

12.4 Summary

In this section of John, we have found John to be discussing issues which are also found in pre-Johannine Christian writings: the relationship between Jesus and Moses, and the question of how Jesus' claims and actions correspond to the demands of the Torah. This is connected with one or more earlier accounts of Jesus healing a blind man, perhaps an independent version or versions of stories recorded in the Synoptics. John uses the traditional motif of healing on the Sabbath to pose the issue in the sharpest possible form: If Jesus has broken the Sabbath, how can he possibly be from God? On the other hand, if he is from God, what does this imply with regard to the Sabbath, or at least contemporary Jewish understanding of the Sabbath? In order to answer the possible objections which could be raised, John does not argue that Jesus did not break the Sabbath, but poses the issue

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[44] See esp. ch. 10 above.

[45] See our discussions in chs. 4 and 10 above.

differently: If Jesus is the prophet like Moses, then it would not be surprising if God (a) confirmed his ministry through signs, and (b) offered new insight into the meaning of Torah. It would also not be surprising if (c) God's own people, who claim to be faithful to Moses, in fact behaved towards the 'prophet like Moses' as the Israelites in the Pentateuchal narratives did towards Moses himself. John adapts the Christian miracle tradition to this purpose: the miracles performed by Jesus actually serve the same function as the signs which God gave to Moses to confirm his divine accreditation and commissioning. Belief in Jesus as the Son of Man is also mentioned allusively in this chapter, and in view of our earlier treatments of some of the other places where this designation appears in John, it will hopefully be clear that, in mentioning the need to recognize Jesus as the Son of Man, John is tying in his presentation of Jesus here to other aspects of his christological portrait, which develop the traditions which he inherited in order to emphasize Jesus' superior revelation.[46]

The development borne witness to in John 9 is perhaps less striking than many of the others we have discussed thus far. Nonetheless, it plays an important role as one of the distinctive aspects of the overall presentation of Jesus in relation to Moses and the issue of how Jesus relates to him. This issue did lead to other more significant developments, which in turn had far-reaching effects on the ongoing development of christology.

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[46] See above, 10.3.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION TO PART THREE

In part three we have seen nothing that would cause us to modify the conclusions which we reached in part two, and have found much further evidence to support our case. In connection with the issue of how Jesus' revelation relates to that of Moses, as in connection with the issue of the relationship between Jesus and God, the Fourth Evangelist engaged in legitimation, attempting to defend his beliefs. In order to do so, he developed the traditions which he inherited. The idea of pre-existence was of particular importance, as it allowed John to attribute to Jesus as Son of Man a knowledge of heavenly things which could not be attributed to any other figure. In his use of Wisdom categories, John is particularly close to earlier writers, as they too made use of Wisdom language and imagery in order to present Christ as superior to Moses/Torah. Nonetheless, John's portrait is more developed than these. This may be due in part to the 'knock-on effects' of the developments which we traced in part two: once John began to rethink the relationship between Wisdom and the human Jesus, further implications for the Moses issue would have become apparent. Yet we have not seen any firm evidence that John's legitimation of christology in relation to the Moses issue is presupposed in his legitimation of his christology against charges of 'blasphemy', nor any evidence that the reverse is true. This being the case, it may be that these issues were

both important at the same time in the conflict, at least by the time John wrote, and that the two issues worked together simultaneously to shape the thinking of the evangelist and his community.

One key feature of John's use of the traditional depiction of Jesus as Son of Man is his use of this 'title' to reinterpret other designations, such as Messiah/Christ, king of Israel, and prophet.[1] This use of Son of Man reflects to a large extent its use in the Synoptics: as a designation which was not already filled with a clearly-defined content to the same extent as other terms, it could serve as the medium to communicate the distinctiveness of Jesus, and the fact that he does not merely fulfil traditional expectations, but also transcends them.[2] Jesus as the Messiah and Son of Man fulfils the expectations which pointed to him, but he is not to be limited to those traditional categories. Rather, traditional concepts of messiahship must be redefined in order to incorporate, and do justice to, who the Messiah in fact turned out to be. In stressing this point, John stands in a close relation to earlier writers, and makes use of a legitimating portrait of Jesus as the Son of Man which others before him had begun to construct. John was not the only one for whom traditional designations such as 'prophet' and 'Messiah' were inadequate: already in Mark the process of attempting to redefine Messiahship in terms of Jesus, rather than force Jesus into the mould of traditional expectation, had begun. By bringing in pre-existence, with the

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[1] Moloney 1978:109; Martyn 1979:130-135; Painter 1992:1870.

[2] Cf. esp. Mark 8:27-31 and parallels; also 14:61f.

implications John drew from it, John developed the Son of Man tradition in response to issues in the controversy with the synagogue. But the idea that Jesus was greater than Moses, than the prophets, than even traditional expectations concerning the Messiah, was an idea which John inherited. He did not invent it, but rather sought to defend this traditional perspective on Jesus, which was part of the foundation of the faith which he and his community shared.[3]

Finally, we may return to the issue which was raised by our treatment of John 3:13 and 6:62. We have suggested that John knew a tradition which presented Jesus on the mountain as having made an ascent of some sort, to meet with God and be affirmed by him in his role as mediator of the new covenant. The imagery used compared Jesus with Moses, who was also believed by many to have made an ascent of this sort at Sinai. It seems quite likely that early Christians may have argued that, if Moses had had such an experience on the mountain, then surely Jesus must have also had such an experience of ascent. By the time John wrote, however, there had been a response from 'the Jews', emphasizing that while it was clear that God had spoken to Moses, it was not at all clear that this was true of Jesus (cf. John 9:29). The Evangelist thus felt the need not simply to compare Jesus with Moses or present him as similar to Moses, but to stress his superiority to Moses. He did this by bringing to the fore other aspects of the tradition which he inherited, such as

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[3] As Martyn 1979:130-135 rightly notes, the chief focus in John's use of Son of Man to reinterpret traditional categories is the Prophetic/Mosaic expectation. The Evangelist's concern to reinterpret 'messianic' expectations in this area in particular reflects the importance of the issue which we have been considering in this chapter for the church-synagogue controversy.

the presentation of Jesus in the imagery of the apocalyptic Son of Man, and also the traditional viewpoint that the decisive moment in the career of Jesus is the descent of the Spirit upon him, rather than an ascent to heaven. The Evangelist was thus able to assert that Jesus as the Son of Man and Word-become-flesh was not merely a human being who had ascended to receive revelation, but the incarnation of one who had pre-existed in heaven, and on this basis could reveal what he saw there in a way that no other could.

With these considerations in view, it seems unlikely that John continued to maintain that Jesus made an ascent akin to the ascent of Moses during his lifetime. But regardless whether the mention of a Moses-like ascent by Jesus in John 3:13 is simply part of a tradition which was insufficiently redacted by the Evangelist, or is something the Evangelist did not deny but merely 'de-emphasized', it is clear that the Evangelist placed all the emphasis on *descent*.[4] The importance of this in terms of the present work is that the Evangelist's reasons for doing so are best understood in terms of legitimation: the Evangelist creatively adapted aspects of the traditions he inherited in order to defend his community's belief in Jesus as the supreme revealer, and to respond to objections raised by Jewish opponents. The developments made as part of this legitimation played an important role in influencing the shape of subsequent christology.

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[4] Our reason for hesitating to assume that John has abandoned the view that Jesus ascended to heaven during his lifetime in a manner similar to Moses is a lack of certainty as to the authority which this idea had. If it was not an authoritative traditional belief, John may have abandoned it; if it was authoritative and he did not feel that he could do this, he may simply have downplayed it.

PART 4

OTHER ISSUES
&
CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 14

OTHER POSSIBLE ISSUES

In the previous two parts of this thesis we have considered what are very likely to be the two issues in the conflict between church and synagogue which had the greatest influence on the development of Johannine christology. They were not the only ones, however, and in this chapter we will attempt to survey some of the other issues which may have been important to the Evangelist and led to the development by him of various earlier christological motifs.

14.1 The Rejection of Jesus

The fact that the majority of Jews did not accept Jesus to be the Messiah promised in the Jewish scriptures was a major problem, which called into question the validity of, and undermined the plausibility structure of, the beliefs of the Johannine Christians. On the one hand, John is convinced that there are in fact many believers among the Jewish people and even among the leaders, who are afraid to admit this because they are afraid of the authorities (cf. 7:12f; 9:22; 12:42f).[1] Yet he also places the objection on the lips of the Pharisees, "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law, there is a curse on them" (John 7:48). That is to say, many felt that only those who were ignorant of the Jewish scriptures would be persuaded

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[1] Whether the Evangelist would have considered such people genuine believers in the fullest sense is beside the point.

to believe in Jesus. John makes use of several traditional motifs in order to legitimate his community's faith in Jesus in spite of his rejection by the majority of 'the Jews'.

14.1.1 The Rejection of Moses

One way in which John sought to demonstrate that the failure of so many Jews to believe did not invalidate the claims made by Christians was to appeal to Jewish traditions about Moses. In the wilderness, Israel had grumbled against Moses; likewise in Jesus' day 'the Jews' grumbled against the one whom God had sent to them (6:41,52). The Israelites in the wilderness saw the *signs* which God performed through Moses, and yet even so they did not believe in him and grumbled against him; likewise in Jesus' day, 'the Jews' refused to believe even in spite of the many signs which he performed (12:37). This last instance is also linked with direct citations from Isaiah, which speak of the stubbornness of God's people. By presenting Jesus in this way, John is able to argue that the rejection of Jesus by his Jewish contemporaries did not discredit the faith of the Johannine Christians, because God's own people had refused to listen to Moses, and it is thus not surprising that they should refuse to listen to the 'prophet like Moses' as well. John is here making use of the traditions which we considered at many points in Part 3, which present Jesus as the prophet like Moses or describe him in Mosaic imagery and categories.[2]

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[2] See further above 2.2.3.

14.1.2 The Rejection of Wisdom

We have already seen how John made use of Wisdom traditions in relation to two other issues in his community's conflict with the synagogue. John shows awareness of and interest in another aspect of the Wisdom tradition, namely, the rejection of Wisdom (which, significantly, is followed by her return to heaven). In 1 Enoch 42:1f, we are told that "Wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people, but she found no dwelling place. (So) Wisdom returned to her place," an idea which is alluded to in John 1:10f. Even in the Hebrew scriptures, it is recognized that some Israelites do not heed Wisdom's call (cf. e.g. Prov. 1:22-33; 9:13-18). A clear reference to Prov. 1:28 is found in John 7:34-36. The presentation of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate thus helped to provide an explanation of why the majority of Jews had not accepted Jesus. They had already in the past rejected God's Wisdom, and the present instance was just one more example of this wider phenomenon recorded in Israel's scriptures and traditions.

14.1.3 Disobedience to God and Scripture

Another way that the author of the Fourth Gospel appeals to tradition in order to legitimate his beliefs, in response to the rejection of Christian claims by most Jews, is to link this rejection to disobedience to God himself as he has revealed himself in Israel's history and scriptures. This theme is obviously very closely linked to the other two we have just considered, since the rejection of God's spokesperson or of his Wisdom is ultimately a rejection of God himself.

In John 5:37, Jesus claims that the Father himself testifies concerning him. This very likely includes the witness of Jesus' signs (5:36), but the focus is probably primarily on the witness of the Father in the Jewish scriptures.[3] If 'the Jews' responded as they should to their own scriptures, which they study so intently, they would come to Jesus (5:38-40). As it is, they cannot appeal to Moses in their defense, because Moses wrote about Jesus and yet they refuse to accept him (5:45-47). The writings of Moses are the revelation of God, the witness of the Father.

In John 6 a similar approach is taken. John blames the refusal of 'the Jews' to believe in Jesus on the fact that they have not been 'drawn by God' (6:44). This is very frequently interpreted as a predestinarian emphasis,[4] which is understandable given the clear examples, particularly in the Dead Sea Scrolls, of the use of predestination as a form of legitimation, as a way of explaining why the majority has not accepted the sect's message.[5] However, the emphasis in John seems to lie elsewhere. The assertion that 'the Jews' do not believe in Jesus because they have not been drawn by the Father appears to function similarly to Exod. 16:8, where Moses is presented as rebuking the Israelites by saying, "You are not

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[3] Note the reference in the immediate context to God's word and the scriptures, as well as the reference to seeing and hearing which recalls the Sinai revelation.

[4] So e.g. Brown 1966:277; Barrett 1978:295; Schnackenburg 1980:50; Haenchen 1984:1:292f; Carson 1991:293; Painter 1991:238. See also Lindars 1972:263 (who denies a predestinarian meaning while still referring this drawing to an inward work of God); Brodie 1993:284.

[5] Cf. e.g. 1QS 3:15-4:26; 4Q186; 4Q534. Cp. also 4 Ezra 3-4,7-8, which maintains free will but nonetheless attributes to the influence of Adam's sin an important role in explaining why there are so few righteous in the present.

grumbling against us, but against Yahweh."[6] It is not an assertion that 'the Jews' cannot believe because they have not been predestined, so much as an accusation of 'the Jews' for not having learned from God, through the scriptures, the revealed truths which would have enabled them to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The verses which immediately follow John 6:44 seem to support our interpretation: it is those who have been open to learn from the Father, presumably as he has revealed himself in the Jewish scriptures,[7] who will come to Jesus. "The gift of the Law is the way in which God has taught and will continue to teach his people. But Jesus, the one who has come down from heaven (see v.42), is claiming that all those who have truly learned from God, whom he continues to call his Father, will come to him."[8] The rejection of Jesus by 'the Jews' is thus presented as a symptom of a wrong attitude to God and an unwillingness to listen to him,[9] particularly as he has spoken in scripture.

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[6] Cf. Moloney 1996:51.

[7] Cf. e.g. Sanders 1968:192f. The Father of Jesus in John is always the God of Israel revealed in the Jewish Scriptures. Cf. esp. 8:54; also 4:21; 5:17. Barrett 1978:296 takes the reference to be to an inner teaching by God, but it is difficult to imagine a Jewish reader who would not immediately associate the teaching of God with the Jewish scriptures. Schnackenburg recognizes this, but nonetheless rejects this interpretation (1980:51).

[8] Moloney 1996:51. See also Lindars 1972:495 on John 15:24.

[9] So rightly Thompson 1988:126f. The reference to Isa. 54:13 in this context by the Johannine Jesus may have carried important intertextual echoes. The original context refers to the restoration of Jerusalem after the exile. Because of the ongoing state of domination by foreigners, many Jews seem to have regarded the exile as something which was continuing (cf. Garnet 1980; Wright 1992:269; Scott 1993). Irrespective of the question of whether John was written before or after A.D.70, the present situation in which the Jewish nation found itself would have worked together with these echoes in order to reinforce the message that Israel's disobedience to God continues even into the present. The close proximity to Isa. 55:1-11 would also help the reader to understand that the use of the imagery of eating and drinking, and the identification of Jesus as the bread which comes down from heaven is really an identification of him as the Word of God (see further ch.9 above). On the Isaiah citation see further Menken 1996:67-77.

John thus puts the onus back on his opponents: are they certain that they have correctly understood what the scriptures teach about the coming one? The Johannine Christians, who were already convinced that Jesus was the one promised in scripture, would have found such arguments convincing and an encouragement to their faith; whether any of John's opponents would have been convinced is less clear. But certainly by blaming the refusal of 'the Jews' to believe on their refusal to listen to God, a refusal which could be traced back to the people of Israel throughout their history as portrayed in scripture, John was able to legitimate his community's beliefs: rejection by the majority is just what one would expect from the people of God, when one is familiar with the accounts of Israel's history of disobedience in the Jewish scriptures.

14.2 Jesus and John the Baptist

Another issue which may possibly have influenced the development of Johannine christology is the debate about the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, which many scholars have suggested lies behind the Fourth Gospel. The emphatic assertions, such as "He himself was not the light" (John 1:8) and "He confessed and did not deny and confessed that he is not the Christ" (1:20), seem to be clear indications of polemic, which implies that some held to the views which are being denied.[10] There is evidence of continuing groups of followers of John the Baptist from Acts 18:25; 19:1-4, and also from the Pseudo-Clementine literature (*Recognitions* 1.54,60).

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[10] Cf. Brown 1966:lxvii-lxx,46-54; Freed 1992:1951,1960f.

Unfortunately, we have very little information about the claims which were made by such groups, but if it is legitimate to 'mirror read' the Fourth Gospel, then they claimed that John was superior to Jesus, and very likely described John as 'Messiah' and even 'the Light'. John makes use of the traditions available to him in order to reject such claims.

One way John does this is to expand on the traditions concerning John's testimony about Jesus. To begin with, he omits any mention of the fact that the initial testimony was given *on the occasion of Jesus' baptism by John*.[11] The fact that Jesus was baptized by John caused difficulty for many early Christians, as can be seen from the way other Gospel writers altered the basic Marcan account.[12] The Fourth Evangelist also attributes more emphatic testimony to John the Baptist, which is placed on the lips of the Baptist himself, which 'clarifies' the Baptist's own understanding of the relation between himself and Jesus (1:19-36; 3:22-30). John thus adapts the traditions concerning Jesus' baptism by John and John's witness to the descent of the Spirit, making more explicit what he understood to already be implied therein, namely the superiority of Jesus over John.

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[11] Cf. Dowell 1990:26, who also notes another significant omission by John (if he knew the Synoptic Gospels), namely the doubts expressed therein by John the Baptist when he was in prison (Matt. 11:2f).

[12] Matthew makes John object and assert that he needs to be baptized by Jesus (Matt.3:14f). Luke places the baptism of Jesus *after* the mention of John's imprisonment (Luke 3:20f) and makes John's testimony about the coming one a direct answer to the question of whether he is the Christ (3:15f). Later writers went further still, as can be seen particularly clearly in the Gospel of the Hebrews, where Jesus is presented as being invited by his family to come with them to be baptized by John, to which Jesus is made to reply, "Wherein have I sinned, that I should go and be baptized of him?".

Another way the Evangelist emphasizes Jesus' superiority compared to John is to emphasize his *temporal priority* and *heavenly origins*. Jesus, in his pre-existence as the Word, was before John (1:15,30), just as he was before Abraham (8:58). As the incarnation of the Logos, Jesus had more claim to the designation 'the Light' than did any other, since the imagery of light was already closely associated with God's Word and Wisdom.[13] And whereas John is a human being among human beings, of earthly origin, Jesus, while also having earthly parents, is the Word become flesh, and thus is of heavenly origin (3:31).[14]

Our lack of direct knowledge concerning the claims made by the followers of John the Baptist, and the paucity of even second-hand information, makes it unwise to speculate too far concerning the details of the conflict and of the development which it may have caused. Nonetheless, it does seem clear that both conflict and the development of earlier tradition can be connected with this issue in the Gospel of John.[15]

14.3 Jesus and Other Figures

Jesus is also contrasted explicitly with two other key figures in the history of Israel: just as we have already seen that Jesus was compared with Moses and John the Baptist, we also have the question raised of whether Jesus is greater than

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[13] See above, p.215.

[14] Cf. Dowell 1990:25.

[15] For some time it was thought that the Mandaean literature gave us access to the beliefs and practices of the followers of John the Baptist. However, in recent times it is much more widely recognized that the late date of these texts makes any use of them to illuminate first century beliefs unwise. See further Dodd 1953:115-130; Brown 1966:lxviii. On the relationship of these narratives to their Synoptic counterparts see also Painter 1993:166-178.

either 'our father Abraham' or 'our father Jacob' (4:12; 8:53). What precisely was at issue here is difficult to determine, but at the very least we may suggest that, since Jesus was being claimed as the Messiah and/or prophet like Moses, as arguably the most decisive figure to have appeared in Israel's history, then Jesus must be shown to have characteristics which demonstrate his superiority compared with other key figures in Israel's history.

14.3.1 Jesus and Abraham

In connection with the question of Jesus' relation to Abraham, mention is made of the divine name 'I am'[16] and of Abraham 'seeing Jesus' day'. The latter phrase must refer to a vision during Abraham's lifetime, since John says that Abraham 'saw' his day, not that he 'has seen' or 'sees' it. There are two possible events which may be in mind. One is the interpretation, attested most clearly in rabbinic literature, which understood Abraham to have been given a vision of the future, including the days of the Messiah.[17] The other is the meeting with three 'men', understood to be Yahweh and/or his angels.[18] It seems impossible to settle the matter definitively, but the reference to 'rejoicing' and 'believing what was heard from God' do appear to favour the latter interpretation.[19] That

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[16] On 'I am' as the divine name see above, pp.146f.

[17] Cf. Barrett 1978:351f; also Brown 1966:360; Beasley-Murray 1987:138f. Midrash Rabbah 44.22,28 attributes this interpretation to tannaitic sages, which may be correct in view of the similar idea found in 4 Ezra 3.14.

[18] So e.g. Hanson 1991:126f.

[19] Cf. Hanson 1965:123-126; 1991:126-131.

John thought of the one who was now incarnate in Christ as having been the one who appeared in the theophanies recorded in the Jewish scriptures seems clear from a number of indications: (1) John also speaks of Isaiah having seen Jesus' glory (John 12:41);[20] (2) John denies that anyone has ever seen God (apart from the Word/Son), suggesting that (as in Philo) it was in fact the Word that was seen by various figures in the Jewish scriptures; (3) the grammar of 9:5 may imply that the one who now speaks through and as Jesus has been in the world before, since the Greek literally reads "*Whenever* (ὅταν) I am in the world, I am the light of the world";[21] (4) the point which is made is not about Abraham's foreknowledge concerning the Messiah, but the eternal 'I am'. Thus the emphasis here is not on Jesus as the Messiah, but on Jesus as the incarnation of the Word. As the incarnation of the one through whom the promises were made to Abraham, Jesus' superiority to Abraham is felt to be clear and indisputable.[22]

14.3.2 Jesus and Jacob-Israel

The comparison with Jacob (4:12) is in a similar vein. We may begin with the imagery of meeting at a well, which is a familiar motif in the patriarchal narratives.[23] The closest

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[20] The reference is presumably to the vision in the temple mentioned in Isa.6. Cf. Schnackenburg 1980:222.

[21] So Burkett 1991:165.

[22] Alternatively, it might be suggested that Jesus is the promised seed, of whom the true Father is God (something which Philo asserts concerning Isaac in *De Mut.*, 131f; see also *De Cher.*, 40-52; Hanson 1991:125-131), and thus in witnessing the birth of Isaac, Abraham witnessed the beginning of the fulfilment of the promises of God concerning his 'seed'. Nevertheless, the interpretation above seems more cogent.

[23] Cf. e.g. Gen. 24:11ff; 29:2ff; also Exod. 2:15ff.

parallel, which is particularly relevant because of the explicit mention of Jacob and his well in this context, is the meeting between Jacob and Rachel described in Gen. 29:2-7, a meeting which also took place at midday.[24] Without getting into some of the more difficult interpretative problems, it does seem that Jesus is portrayed as creating a new, restored, eschatological Samaria/Israel, who will worship in spirit and truth through Jesus himself, who is the true temple (2:21; 4:23f). Jesus is also the source of living water which provides eternal life, rather than simply water which quenches one's literal thirst temporarily. As such, Jesus is 'greater than our father Jacob'.

This ties in with the imagery which John uses in 1:51. This verse is more or less unanimously accepted to be taking up the imagery of Jacob's vision in Genesis 28:12f,[25] and while it may not be dependent on early rabbinic exegesis of that text, it at the very least takes a similar approach in interpreting it, as we shall see below. This passage is also linked by some scholars to the church-synagogue controversy,[26] which adds to its potential interest for our study.

There are a number of indications that this verse was not composed by the evangelist for use in its present setting, but already existed in some form prior to being made use of here. Most frequently noted are the fact that there is a change from singular (ὄψῃ) to plural (ὄψεσθε), the superfluous 'and he said

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[24] Cf. Carmichael 1996:105.

[25] Cf. e.g. Dodd 1953:246; Higgins 1964:158-161; Brown 1966:89-91; Neyrey 1982:589; Ashton 1991:342; Létourneau 1993:312; Kanagaraj 1995:156; Casey 1996:60,106.

[26] So e.g. Haenchen 1984:1:167; Hanson 1991:38.

to him', and the use of the double 'amen', which is sometimes regarded as an indicator that the Evangelist is using a traditional saying.[27] The view that the differences between this verse and its present context are because it is a later addition to the Gospel seems less likely than that it is due to the Evangelist's use here of a tradition which had a prior history of use in other contexts.[28] Yet we are not to think of the Evangelist simply inserting a preformed saying into a narrative which once existed without it, but rather of the *adaptation* of a saying, or at the very least of imagery and language, which the Evangelist inherited.[29]

Higgins attempts to distinguish between Johannine Son of Man sayings which are of a Synoptic type and those which are not, and this verse is placed in the former category. The reasons which he gives are as follows: (1) Jesus is not explicitly identified as the Son of Man; (2) 'amen' is used in connection with a reference to the future glory of the Son of Man; (3) there is association with angels; and (4) reference is made to heaven being opened.[30] Several scholars note a

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[27] Higgins 1964:160; Brown 1966:88f; Painter 1991:153; 1992:1873 (although note the objections in Carson 1991:165f, which do not demonstrate that Brown is wrong, but at least caution that the prehistory of the verse cannot be known with certainty). Cf. also John 3:13 (and our discussion of this verse above, ch.10), which also shows signs of being an independent logion which has its own history independent of its present setting. The appeal to the double 'amen' is probably the weakest argument, since these words regularly introduce sayings which express Johannine theology in Johannine language.

[28] Cf. Neyrey 1982:586-589. It is nonetheless far too simplistic to suggest that John has inserted v51 here while otherwise leaving the narrative intact (*contra* Neyrey 1982:587f).

[29] Lindars 1973:46f; Loader 1991:271f.

[30] Higgins 1964:157f; he notes in connection with the last point the similar language used in Acts 7:56. Ashton's statement (1991:342), "By no stretch of the imagination could this saying or anything remotely like it be derived from the Synoptic tradition as we know it", overstates the case.

similarity with the Son of Man logion found at Matt. 26:64, a similarity which was apparently noticed already by some of the early copyists and scribes, who added to the Johannine saying the words 'from now on' from the Matthean logion.[31] There seem to be good reasons, then, for regarding this Son of Man saying as bearing a close relationship to its Synoptic counterparts. It promises in the future a vision of the heavens opened, and of the glorified Son of Man in the presence of angels.[32]

What is John doing with this traditional Son of Man language here, and how is he relating it to the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Jacob? The answer which seems most probable to the present author is that here, as in John 6:25-59, the Evangelist is developing traditional christological motifs by relating them to passages in the Jewish scriptures by means of rabbinic-type exegesis. John is appealing both to the Jesus tradition and to the Jewish scriptures in order to demonstrate Jesus' superiority, in ways that we will now consider.

In rabbinic exegesis of Gen. 28:12, the Hebrew word *bô* was recognized to be ambiguous: it could mean either 'on it' (i.e., on the ladder) or 'on him'. The latter understanding could be understood to mean that the angels were ascending and

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[31] Brown 1966:84; Lindars 1972:121; Létourneau 1993:313f. Neyrey 1982:599f also notes similarities (and differences) between this verse and Mark 14:62 (see also Smalley 1968:287f). Kanagaraj 1995:155 argues against these parallels in favour of an interpretation of this verse in light of early Jewish mysticism; however, I see no reason why the two must be mutually exclusive.

[32] When this vision of the Son of Man will be granted is not specified; however, no fulfilment is recounted in the course of the Gospel, and it would thus appear that, like its Synoptic counterparts, it promises the glorification of the Son of Man after his exaltation. Cf. the discussion in Loader 1991; De Boer 1996:161.

descending 'on Jacob'.[33] This interpretation may well stem from as early as the time of John, but whether or not this is the case does not affect our argument[34] - John's reading of the Genesis text may simply represent an independent interpretation of the passage in a 'rabbinic' fashion, i.e. using techniques of exegesis which were the same as or similar to those used by the later rabbis. That John should engage in such exegesis in the context of a debate with the synagogue seems *a priori* likely, and it would seem necessary to disagree with the conclusion reached by Martyn that the Fourth Evangelist was opposed to midrash and exegesis as a means of debate with his Jewish opponents.[35] On the contrary, the Jewish Scriptures were an authoritative source for the Johannine Christians, and would, when interpreted 'correctly', support the legitimacy of the community's beliefs, because the Scriptures testify to Jesus.[36]

As we have noted, it was the ambiguity of the Hebrew word *bô* which made possible the interpretation 'on him' rather than 'on it'. However, it does not seem that John read the text as meaning that the angels ascended and descended upon Jacob;[37] in John 1:47 it is Nathanael who is presented in the role of the 'true Israelite' and who is promised a vision like Jacob's.[38]

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[33] For this interpretation see Genesis Rabbah 68:18; also Targums Neofiti and Ps.-Jon. to Gen.28:12. Cf. also Clarke 1975:374.

[34] Higgins 1964:159.

[35] Cf. e.g. Martyn 1979:127f,134.

[36] John 5:39. Cf. Whitacre 1982:25,32f; also Pancaro 1975:83,116.

[37] *Contra* Dodd 1953:245; Clarke 1975:374.

[38] Neyrey 1982:589; Ashton 1991:348.

Thus, the Evangelist appears to be reading the text christologically: the angels ascended and descended upon *him*, but that him is not Jacob, but the Son of Man.

Neyrey has suggested that the Son of Man here is identified with or takes the place of neither the ladder nor Jacob, but rather the figure of 'the Lord' who stood atop the ladder. This, as he points out, would fit well with the Evangelist's high Logos christology, which represents the one incarnate in Christ as the Word or Glory of God, which was what Old Testament figures saw when it says that God appeared to them. However, the fact that a particular reading coheres with Johannine theology (or with one possible understanding of Johannine theology) does not immediately indicate that this reading is the best one. In none of the Jewish traditions which are available to us are the angels represented as having ascended and descended upon Yahweh; it is always either upon the ladder or Jacob. Attempts to suggest that the author means that the angels ascended (and descended?) *to* the Son of Man are unconvincing and do insufficient justice to the wording which the Evangelist has chosen to use.[39] In John, the figure atop the ladder is not mentioned, and it may be that the author read the Genesis passage as indicating that the Lord was atop the ladder, in heaven, but was not able to be seen by Jacob - or possibly was beside the ladder, as we shall suggest below. At any rate, although the ladder is not mentioned, and neither is Jacob, all of the indications suggest that the Son of Man was

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[39] Neyrey 1982:590,598 and Loader 1991:271f do not adequately address this point.

understood by the Evangelist to fulfil the role of the *ladder* in Jacob's vision.

We should now ask whether there was any feature in the Genesis text which encouraged its use in connection with the figure of the Son of Man. The similar imagery of heavenly visions involving angels would have provided one crucial point of contact. Another feature which may have aided the identification of Jesus, as the exalted Son of Man seated alongside God in heaven, with the ladder of Jacob's vision, was the fact that the Hebrew of Gen. 28:13 could be understood to mean that the Ancient of Days was standing *beside* the ladder, which would of course mean that the ladder was alongside God in the position that was ascribed by Christians to the Son of Man.[40] Yahweh is presented in the Hebrew Bible as enthroned in heaven, but resting his feet upon the earth as a footstool,[41] and this would be appropriate alongside a heavenly ladder the foot of which rests upon the earth. This suggestion cannot be proved, since we can here (as in many other cases) only hypothesize how the Evangelist read interpreted this particular text in the Jewish scriptures. However, given that he exploited the ambiguity of *bô*, it would not be surprising that he should notice and exploit the ambiguity of another Hebrew word in the text. Further support for this suggestion may perhaps be found in the fact that Targums Neofiti and Ps.-Jon. read at Gen.

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[40] Cf. Hengel 1995:136, who notes the interchangeability between reference to someone being at God's right hand and reference to God being at that person's right hand, as e.g. in Ps. 110:1,5. See also our discussion of John 1:18 above, 7.2.

[41] Isa. 66:1; also implicitly 1 Chron. 28:2 (the ark, which rests on the earth, is the footstool of Yahweh, who sits enthroned in heaven); 2 Esd.6:4. See also Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Lam. 2:1. That this idea was current in New Testament times is clear from Matt. 5:35; Acts 7:49.

28:13 that the Lord (or an angel or the glory of the Lord) stood *beside* him (i.e., Jacob). In the Targums which exploit the ambiguity of the Hebrew *bô* (and also in Genesis Rabbah 69:3), the ambiguity of the Hebrew *'alâw* is also exploited.[42]

In the Johannine christological reading and exegesis of the Genesis passage, therefore, Jesus does not appear to be identified with Jacob-Israel, or we should say with the earthly figure of Jacob-Israel. It may be suggested, however, that John was aware of the idea of a heavenly counterpart to the earthly Israel,[43] which could then be identified with the messianic Son of Man who embodies the identity of Israel.[44] The rabbinic texts do not provide sufficient evidence, at least on their own, to allow us to date the exegesis of Gen. 28:12 in terms of the earthly and heavenly Israel earlier than the third century C.E.[45] However, Philo (among others) already thinks of 'Israel' as the name of a heavenly being, namely the Logos.[46] Further, it cannot be without significance that the function[47] of the 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7 is as an image or symbol of the 'saints of the most high', the faithful Israelites upon the earth. Perhaps the promise made to Nathanael is that he, as a

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[42] Cf. Clarke 1975:377 n.18. If this suggestion is correct, it fits well with the view of Loader 1991:272 that the vision is of the heavenly status of the exalted Son of Man. See also Neyrey 1982:600.

[43] A position argued for by Fossum 1995:135-151.

[44] So rightly Casey 1996:60.

[45] As Brown 1966:90 rightly points out.

[46] Cf. Philo, *De Conf.*, 146; see also *Prayer of Joseph* and Smith 1968:262-268. Note also the striking description of God's Word in Wisd. 18:14-16 as having his head toughing heaven and his feet upon the earth.

[47] We are not necessarily saying that the Son of Man *was* the saints of the most high, but simply that the figure of the Son of Man, whether intended as a real human or angelic figure or as merely a symbol, *represents* them.

'true Israelite', will see the vision which Jacob/Israel saw, and (unlike him?) will recognize the ladder to be none other than the image of the heavenly Israel, the Son of Man. Such a correspondence is given further credence when it is noted that in several streams of tradition 'Israel' is interpreted as deriving from the Hebrew *'ish ro'eh 'el* or 'a man who sees God'.[48] The 'true Israelite' is granted a vision of the Son of Man; and the Son of Man, the heavenly Israel, is the link between heaven and earth, and the one who alone is truly 'a man who sees God' in the fullest sense and is thus able to reveal him. This identification also fits in well with the emphasis in John on Jesus, the Son of Man, as the bringer of revelation of heavenly things.[49]

Whatever this pericope's prehistory before being placed in its present context in John, it is included here in the context of Jesus' supernatural knowledge about Nathanael, which evokes from him a confession of Jesus as 'Son of God' and 'King of Israel'. Jesus' response promising a vision of the Son of Man can be expected to relate to these themes. The future vision will not only confirm that Jesus is the Messiah and King of Israel, but will also offer a far greater demonstration of his ability to reveal things which no other person can.[50] The Son of Man shall be seen alongside God, in a position which is

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[48] See the texts and references helpfully compiled in Smith 1968:265-268.

[49] There is an obvious tension between Jesus as the one who sees God and the one whom to see is to see God. This is a tension which pervades the Gospel and is not limited to the present passage. See further our discussion of the tensions in John below, ch.15.

[50] In Philo's exegesis of the passage (*On Dreams* 1:147f), the angels who ascend and descend on the ladder are God's words. The reference in Gen.28:17 to the place as 'the house of God' and 'the gate of heaven' also link in to christological motifs found later in John.

both rightfully that of the Davidic Messiah, and also a demonstration that Jesus is far greater than the expectations held by many about who the Messiah would be: he is the true 'man who sees God', and thus is in fact 'greater than our father Jacob', as the one who is the revealer *par excellence* and who thus links heaven and earth, as the one who inspired such awe in Jacob when he was seen by him in his dream. There are indications that the Evangelist is seeking to demonstrate certain aspects of Christian belief about Jesus - not only in response to the question of the relationship between Jesus and Jacob, but also his qualifications as revealer and his exalted status.[51] In order to do so he develops the traditions which were authoritative for him and his community, in particular by relating a scriptural 'proof text' to the Son of Man tradition.

Before concluding we may perhaps mention that the fulfilment of the promise which is made to Nathanael is nowhere recorded in the Gospel;[52] the same is true of the challenge to Nicodemus to be born again and so 'see the Kingdom of God' as the Johannine Christians can, and of the related promise of the gift of living water made in 4:10-14 and 7:37-39. This last passage appears to provide an explanation of why the spiritual and visionary experiences of the community are not recounted: they were not possible until the pouring out of the Spirit upon Jesus' followers subsequent to the glorification of Jesus. The

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[51] In view of the controversy discussed in Part Two, this presentation of Jesus as the Son of Man alongside God in relation to imagery found in the Jewish scriptures may have helped legitimate the idea, if it was in fact controversial in and of itself, of sitting in heaven.

[52] Although those familiar with the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism might have recalled the witness of the Baptist to heaven opening and the Spirit descending. Cf. Lindars 1973:46; Ashton 1991:346.

Johannine Christians have themselves presumably experienced those things which provide the capstone of this attempt to legitimate their beliefs; to their Jewish opponents, these things remain a mystery to which they do not have access, and no concessions will be made to their unbelief: if they will not accept what the community claims about earthly things, no attempt will be made to convince them by telling them of heavenly things (John 3:11-12).[53]

14.4 The Death of the Messiah

It is widely recognized that the idea of a crucified Messiah was one which Judaism on the whole found objectionable.[54] In pre-Johannine writings, Christians appeal to the necessity of the event because it was foreordained in God's plan and in scripture,[55] and John also inherited this approach to the issue.[56] However, John nonetheless presents Jewish objections to this idea more explicitly than other writers: "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son

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[53] A connection with John 14:18-22 is also possible. The Synoptic account of Jesus' response at his Jewish trial suggests that his adversaries will see him enthroned in heaven. John may have deal with the problem of the lack of any fulfilment of this prediction by reinterpreting the prediction in terms of a spiritual seeing which only those who believe can experience. Nonetheless, John seems to expect that Jesus' adversaries will recognize who Jesus is subsequent to his crucifixion and exaltation (cf. 8:28).

[54] See in particular Paul's references to the cross as a 'stumbling block' (1 Cor. 1:23), and Mark's presentation of the inability of even the disciples to understand (Mark 8:31f; 9:31f; 10:32-34).

[55] Cf. e.g. Luke 24:26f; 1 Cor. 15:3f. These authors show clear evidence of a conviction that these things were foretold in scripture, but what passages they had in mind is unclear.

[56] Cf. e.g. John 2:22; 3:14 (where the traditional 'must' (δει) is found, and where John attempts to see in the lifting up of the bronze serpent by Moses a prefiguring of the crucifixion). See also Whitacre 1982:40.

of Man'?" (John 12:34).[57] It is thus worth considering whether there is any evidence that the Fourth Evangelist further developed the traditions which he inherited, in response to questions and objections raised concerning the death of Jesus.[58]

John, like the Synoptics, presents the passion predictions in terms of the Son of Man.[59] It is apparently the Messianic overtones of 'Son of Man' which lead to objections: the Son of Man whom 'the Jews' have read about in the scriptures is the victorious apocalyptic figure, messianically interpreted.[60] It was thus the use of 'Son of Man' in reference not only to Jesus' apocalyptic parousia, but also to his suffering, which was felt to be objectionable, and this is clearly an aspect of Christian belief which predates John.[61] John, we may now suggest, found a way to appeal to Jewish

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[57] Nicholson 1983:139 denies that the issue here is that of the crucified Messiah. Nicholson's interpretation frequently does insufficient justice to the *crucifixion* aspect of the 'lifting up' sayings. Cf. the balanced criticisms of Carson 1991:437. Moloney 1996:193 n.56 goes too far in the other direction. See also Barrett 1978:428; Hare 1990:108. Létourneau 1993:334 even goes so far as to write that "la function principale du schème christologique du Fils de l'homme en *Jn* est d'interpreter l'événement central qu'est la mort en croix de Jésus...Pour valider la prétention de Jésus comme Envoyé eschatologique du Père, il fallait montrer que la croix n'était pas le lieu de l'échec, mais plutôt celui de l'achèvement de sa mission." While we agree that this issue was of great importance to John, the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses, which provoked the developments in the Son of Man concept which we traced in the previous chapter, was very likely equally important to the evangelist and his readers.

[58] We will be focusing on the passion predictions here because they give clearer indications of the distinctive interpretation which John gave to the passion. John's passion narrative is clearly different from that of the Synoptics as well. See further e.g. Dodd 1963:121-136; Brown 1970:787-791; Minear 1983; Robinson 1985:275-281; Pryor 1992:72f,109-111.

[59] See above 2.2.2.

[60] Carson 1991:445f; see also the texts cited in Kovacs 1995:236-246. Even outside of the apocalyptic literature the Messiah's kingdom was expected to remain forever; cf. Schnackenburg 1980:394; Michaels 1984:230; Beasley-Murray 1987:215; Hanson 1991:165. See also Lindars 1972:434f; Grayston 1990:101; Létourneau 1993:294f; Witherington 1995:225f.

[61] Cf. Kovacs 1995:240-242.

tradition in order to present the death of the Son of Man on the cross as a victory over the forces of evil, thus showing in a fuller way that Jesus' death is scriptural, and that it is therefore not incompatible with the claim that he is the Messiah.

In Colossians, we also find the idea that Christ's death was in some sense a victory over evil spiritual forces (Col. 2:15). This idea, as it is found in John, may thus perhaps represent an earlier apologetic which John is continuing, rather than implications which he was the first to draw. If there is a distinctive emphasis in John, it is the presentation of the crucifixion in terms of 'lifting up' and 'glorification'. The cross is the first step of the Son of Man in his return to heaven, but more than that, the cross is in itself somehow paradoxically the glorification or enthronement of the Son of Man.[62] The use of 'glory' (δόξα) language in connection with the Son of Man most naturally recalls the traditions concerning the Son of Man seated in heaven upon his *throne of glory*.[63] The lifting up to heaven on or via the cross represents the taking of the power and authority given to him by God, and this follows directly from his obedience even unto death.[64] The enthronement of the Son of Man indicates his victory, and the victory of the people of God, over the forces of evil which oppose him/them (Dan. 7).[65] The power of the

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[62] So e.g. Barrett 1978:423,427. *Contra* Nicholson 1983:141-144. See also Lindars 1972:427.

[63] Kovacs 1995:244f.

[64] Cf. Phil. 2:6-11; Matt. 28:18 (on which also above pp.140f); Rev. 5; Heb. 1:3f; 2:9.

[65] Cf. Létourneau 1993:295.

'ruler of this world' is then overcome, so that he is cast down from the heavenly places.[66]

Thus Kovacs rightly states that "The Fourth Evangelist, drawing on earlier tradition, has developed his own distinctive understanding of the death of Christ."[67] All that needs to be added is that this development out of and on the basis of earlier tradition is part of the legitimation in which the Fourth Evangelist is engaging, attempting to defend and demonstrate the validity of the beliefs he inherited in response to objections raised against them. By developing the idea of the Son of Man who suffers in relation to the apocalyptic worldview which forms the background for the idea of the heavenly Son of Man, John was able to present the crucifixion of Jesus as the Messiah not merely as a scandal foreordained in scripture, but as the expected victory of the Son of Man.[68]

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[66] I am grateful for this insight to the paper read by Ron Piper at the New Testament Conference in Aberdeen in September 1996, entitled "Satan, Demons and the Absence of Exorcisms in the Fourth Gospel". Regardless of whether it is the original reading, the interpretation of 12:31 in terms of 'casting *down*' is very likely correct. For John as many other contemporary writers, heaven is the place of God whereas the lower world is under the influence of baneful spiritual powers (cp. the similar idea in Rev. 12:7ff). For a slightly different interpretation cf. Witherington 1995:224.

[67] Kovacs 1995:246f.

[68] Cf. Nicholson 1983:143f, who also discerns in the distinctive Johannine portrait indications that John is responding to objections. See also Ashton 1991:496. De Boer 1996 was unavailable to me until this thesis was essentially complete. Many of his points concerning the reinterpretation of Jesus' death in relation to new circumstances agree with our own conclusions, although we have not sought to discern different stages of development in John's view of the death of Jesus corresponding to different editions of the Gospel. If the references to 'lifting up' and 'glorification' derive from the portrait of the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah, this too would provide a clearer scriptural basis for the idea that a figure who could be interpreted messianically could suffer. John's portrait of Jesus in 1:33-36 as the chosen one of God, as the lamb of God and as the one on whom the Spirit descends all recall the portrait of the Servant in Isa. 42:1 (cf. Boismard 1953:161). The traditions in Jewish literature concerning the martyrs overcoming God's/Israel's enemies through their suffering and death may also have played a crucial role. In each of these cases we are dealing with traditional Jewish ideas which are alluded to in connection with these issues prior to John, but which are more fully developed by him.

14.5 A Contrived Messiah?[69]

Another possible objection which may have been raised is that the supposed fulfilment of scripture and messianic expectations by Jesus was in fact contrived: i.e., some may have suggested that Jesus arranged, with the help of his disciples, so as to be able to perform acts which would make him appear to be the Messiah. Objections of this sort were raised prior to John, as we can see for example from Matt. 27-28, where the resurrection is attributed by Jewish opponents to the theft of the body by the disciples. Whereas Matthew responds to this objection simply by portraying it as false, John takes a different approach, and draws on the traditional motif of the failure of Jesus' disciples to understand him. John thus emphasizes that Jesus' followers did not understand Jesus' words which foretold his resurrection until after the event (2:21f).[70] Likewise the entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was not recognized as having messianic significance until after the event (12:16).[71] The implication is that, if the disciples did not understand these things at the time, then they could not have been involved in an elaborate plot to make Jesus appear to be the Messiah. The same is true of John the Baptist: his testimony concerning Jesus was not prearranged, but was a response to a revelation received from God.[72] If such accusations as these were made, then it may be suggested that John adapts the traditions which he inherited in such a way as to emphasize that Jesus'

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[69] For what follows see our fuller discussion in McGrath 1997b.

[70] McGrath 1997b:12f.

[71] McGrath 1997b:4-7.

[72] McGrath 1997b:11.

fulfilment of scripture was genuine and the result of God's action, rather than being the result of a plot by Jesus and his friends.

14.6 Summary

In this chapter, as in the previous two, we have seen the Fourth Evangelist facing objections and questions from his Jewish interlocutors. In response, he seeks to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus to other figures in Israel's history, and to show why the failure of the majority of his Jewish contemporaries to accept Jesus as the Messiah does not discredit the Christian faith. This he does, once again, by engaging in legitimation, adapting the traditions he inherited and drawing out new implications from them. The evidence surveyed in this chapter thus fits with and supports the overall hypothesis for which we have been arguing thus far.

CHAPTER 15

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

15.1 The Coherence of John's Portrait

The question which we will be addressing in this chapter is whether John integrated these developments, which he made to various traditions in response to many different issues, into a coherent portrait of Christ. One important point needs to be made from the outset: it must be recognized that what seems incoherent to a reader today may not have seemed so to an ancient reader.[1] In other words, our task will by definition contain a measure of anachronism. Nonetheless, it still seems worthwhile to note, wherever possible, indications that may help us to understand the underlying thought-world that harmonized elements that appear to us today to be in tension, or to recognize where, even in John's time, certain ideas were widely thought to be incompatible.

It may be useful to distinguish between two 'types' of tension which may exist in the Fourth Gospel. Anderson has recently emphasized that the tensions which modern readers perceive in Johannine thought may be either *internal* or *external* to the Evangelist. In other words, the tensions in the Evangelist's literary work may represent either tensions in his own thought, or tensions between unharmonized elements

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[1] Kysar 1985b:203 notes this problem, but nonetheless takes the view that we should assume that what is paradoxical or contradictory to us would likewise have been so to the evangelist and his readers, until we have clear evidence to the contrary. See also Hengel 1989:103.

of different literary strata.[2] This distinction is an important one; however, in terms of our reading of John it is entirely possible to reach the conclusion that, in a sense, both are true. Given that we are looking at John in terms of the development of earlier tradition, it seems very possible that John may have developed elements of the tradition, which created tension between these elements and others that were not developed along similar lines. However, John may nonetheless have been aware of these tensions and felt that they were 'mysteries' which he and his community could be content to live with. We shall hopefully be better able to answer the question of what *sort* of tension is found in John, once we have looked at aspects of John which are often felt to be in tension one with another.

It is difficult to know where to begin an investigation of this type, given the multi-faceted character of Johannine christology. We may content ourselves with looking at major themes, motifs and emphases which previous scholarship has felt to be inconsistent, and/or which are open to more than one possible interpretation. A helpful guide will also be the debates which took place subsequent to the writing of the Fourth Gospel, whether in the Johannine epistles[3] or even later.

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[2] Anderson 1996:4-15.

[3] It is the view of most scholars that the epistles were written after the Gospel. Cf. Brown 1982:32-35 (and also 69ff); also Talbert 1992:3, who notes this as the majority view even though he opposes it. It is of course possible that the Gospel was redacted in relation to the later controversies reflected in the Epistles, which might explain the presence of Christians who do not believe, in particular in John 6 and 8.

15.2 Son of Man and Logos

Perhaps one of the most obvious and most puzzling issues is the relationship between the pre-existent Son of Man and the pre-existent Logos, or more precisely, the pre-existence of the Son of Man and that of the Logos. Are the two identical? If not, were they united even prior to the incarnation? Did they both come down from heaven at the same time? And most importantly, was John even aware that such questions would need an answer?

A good place to begin is with the suggestion, which has been made by several scholars in recent times, that John did not think of the Son of Man as a figure who descends and ascends. Such a viewpoint has been expressed by Lindars,[4] and in a similar vein Pryor has recently argued "that the presumed nexus between the Johannine Son of Man and a descent-ascent Christology is simply not there and that the Johannine Son of Man is not to be thought of as a heavenly descending-ascending figure."[5] Pryor is clearly right to emphasize that John 1:51 has often been wrongly used to demonstrate such a connection, since in this verse it is the *angels* who ascend and descend, rather than the Son of Man.[6] However, he fails to do justice to the reference in 6:62 to the Son of Man ascending to *where he was before*. The key difficulty with Pryor's article is that he is polemicizing, and thus tends to make unbalanced assertions. As he clarifies slightly later, "that John makes use of a descending-ascending Christology is not to be denied.

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[4] Lindars 1973:48 n.16. See also De Boer 1996:174.

[5] Pryor 1991b:341.

[6] Pryor 1991b:341f.

The point at issue is whether descent-ascent (and especially descent) is particularly tied to "Son of Man.""[7]

What needs to be stressed is that, inasmuch as John's understanding of Jesus as Son of Man is firmly rooted in earlier Christian tradition, the key emphases associated with this designation are not descent-ascent, but crucifixion and exaltation (which John combines through his use of the term 'lifting up'). Nonetheless, John has also clearly taken up and developed the incipient pre-existence conceptuality which, by the time he wrote, had become linked to the figure of the Son of Man.[8] For John, the Son of Man was a figure who had pre-existed in heaven, and who had now come to earth, and this was of crucial importance for the Evangelist, inasmuch as this way of thinking about the Son of Man enabled him to defend the superior qualifications of Jesus to reveal God.[9] However much one may feel the need to qualify possible previous overemphasis on the Son of Man as a figure who descends and ascends, in the two passages in John where the concepts of Son of Man and pre-existence/ascent-descent are linked, they play a vital role in John's legitimation. The fact that the link is made explicitly only in two passages simply demonstrates John's close dependence on tradition, while the fact that he develops the traditional imagery in the way that he does shows

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[7] Pryor 1991b:348. See also De Boer 1996:159-162.

[8] See above, 2.2.2.

[9] See our discussion above, ch.10. We thus disagree with De Boer 1996:174f inasmuch as we see pre-existence as of crucial importance in John's motivation for developing the Son of Man tradition in the way that he did.

that these further developments were deemed by him to be important and necessary.[10]

Having clarified our findings concerning John's position and emphases in this area, we may now move on to another important point: namely, that the issue of the relationship between the pre-existence of the Son of Man and the pre-existence of God's Wisdom/Word/Spirit is an issue which was already implicitly raised by the tradition which John inherited. In the Similitudes of Enoch, the pre-existent Son of Man is portrayed as already being indwelt by God's Spirit of wisdom (1 Enoch 49:3), and as revealing God's wisdom to the righteous (1 Enoch 48:7).[11] Shall the Son of Man be born already 'full of wisdom'? And if the Son of Man's relationship with Wisdom is unbroken, will the Son of Man remember his earlier existence in heaven?[12] Such questions are not reflected on in 1 Enoch; they are nonetheless raised at least implicitly by 1 Enoch's portrait, although they are not the subject of

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[10] The view of Leivestad 1972:253 (cf. also Lindars 1973:48 n.16; Moloney 1978:122; Hare 1990:111) that "The Johannine Son of Man is not a heavenly being who has revealed himself on earth. The Son of man is the incarnate logos, the Jesus from Nazareth", cannot be maintained. In John, the Son of Man *is* the incarnate Logos, Jesus of Nazareth, and for the most part bears connotations which are traditional and which carry no overtones of pre-existence. Nonetheless, John has developed the traditional view, in a similar way to - and probably under the influence of - other contemporary writers, so that he now clearly thinks of the Son of Man having come down from heaven. The reasons for this development have already been discussed above (esp. in ch.10), and these concerns of the author would appear to confirm our view. See further also Painter 1992:1879f n.46.

[11] See also Theobald 1988:396f, who notes possible evidence of the influence of the portrait of Wisdom in Wis.8:23-26 on the portrait of the Son of Man in 1 Enoch 48:3,6.

[12] On this latter point John appears to give an explicit answer to a question implicitly raised by the Enochic tradition, and this answer is an affirmative one: whatever the precise relationship between Jesus as Wisdom and Jesus as Son of Man, the earthly Jesus remembered a prior existence in heaven on the basis of which he could reveal heavenly things to others. However, John does not reflect on what implications this might have for Jesus' knowledge, for example, as an infant, presumably because he had other concerns which were more pressing.

any further reflection or discussion. This ambiguity was therefore present in the tradition which John is likely to have inherited.

The Johannine answer is not entirely clear, most likely due to the fusing of the Enochic/apocalyptic traditions concerning the pre-existent Son of Man who is indwelt by God's Spirit, with the Jesus tradition, which presented the Spirit as coming upon Jesus at his baptism. In John's portrait, it is clear that the human Jesus, the Son of Man and the Word or Wisdom of God are no longer to be regarded as 'separate entities' after this event, but what about before it?[13]

One possible answer is that John identified the pre-existent figures of the Son of Man and Wisdom/Logos. At first sight such an idea may seem impossible, since the Logos is none other than God himself inasmuch as he can be known,[14] whereas the Son of Man is the (human) Messiah. However, given that John was able to fully identify the Logos and the human Jesus in the incarnation, such a proposal appears worthy of consideration. John may have found a basis for the identification of these figures in the Old Greek reading in Dan. 7:13, which speaks of the Son of Man coming "*as* the ancient of days" (ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερων).[15] If John was familiar

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[13] A comparable problem arises in Luke's portrait of Jesus and John the Baptist. The Baptist is said to be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth (Luke 1:15). If Jesus did not receive the Spirit until his baptism, does this make him inferior to John? And if his conception through the power of the Spirit means that he was filled with the Spirit from birth, then what is the meaning of the descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism?

[14] On this point cf. Dunn 1989:226-228.

[15] On this reading see Stuckenbruck 1995.

with this reading,[16] then the description of the Son of Man as a heavenly figure, who is both separate from God and yet ultimately none other than God himself, may have enabled him to identify the Son of Man with Wisdom/Logos.[17] However, at this point certainty appears impossible, since John does not give any explicit indication that he made such an identification, much less that he made it on this basis.[18]

Ultimately, it would seem that John has left an element of ambiguity in his portrait, although as we have already pointed out, the ambiguity of his *literary* presentation does not necessarily indicate an ambiguity in his own thought. We must also give serious consideration to the possibility that the questions which we are raising may not have occurred to the Evangelist or his earliest readers. In the Prayer of Joseph, Israel is presented as being (or becoming) aware of actually being an angelic figure. Such a portrait, like that of John, raises - for us, at least - certain questions, such as whether Jacob 'is' the angelic figure, or whether the angelic figure is the heavenly equivalent or parallel to the human, earthly Jacob. It also leads us to ask when the angel 'became' the human figure of Jacob - was it at birth or at

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[16] For arguments in favour of John having known the Old Greek version of the Jewish scriptures, see Schuchard 1992; Menken 1996.

[17] For other possible indicators of an identification in contemporary thought between the heavenly (Son of) Man and Wisdom/Logos, see the references in Coppens 1981:93 n.165. He regards the distinctive Johannine Son of Man sayings as midrash/pesher interpretations of earlier Gospel traditions (1981:95). See also the discussion we have already cited in Theobald 1988:396-398, and Painter 1992:1879f n.46.

[18] Such an understanding may perhaps be implied by the similarity between elements of the Johannine literature and references in some 'heretical' early Christian literature to the one who descended on Jesus at his baptism as 'Christ', so that Jesus 'becomes Christ' at that point. Note also the stress in 1 John that Jesus is the Christ, which may mean that the argument was over whether the union between the human Jesus and the divine Christ was permanent or not. Cf. further Watson 1987:118f.

some later point? And if it was at birth, did the human Jacob always remember his prior existence, or did the memory return at a later point?[19] Such questions that may be raised do not appear to have been given an explicit answer (although we cannot be certain, given the extremely fragmentary nature of our knowledge of this work), and yet this is not felt to spoil the story or detract from its plausibility. Both John's portrait of Jesus, and the Prayer of Joseph's portrait of Jacob, are mythological, in the sense that they use extended metaphors in order to speak of divine and/or metaphysical realities which cannot be accessed or spoken of directly.[20] John may have been 'inconsistent' by modern standards, but it is not clear that such a form of consistency is to be expected in an ancient work such as the Fourth Gospel.[21]

Ultimately, the Son of Man and Wisdom are to be identified, because they are both now to be identified with the person of Jesus.[22] At least by the time John 6 was composed, this tension appears to have been internalized by the Evangelist. There, Jesus is presented both as the giver of the bread of life (i.e. the Son of Man; cf. 6:27) and as the bread of life itself (i.e. Wisdom; cf. 6:35,48).[23] The tension which we have noticed to be a feature of the Gospel as a whole

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[19] The existing text suggests the latter, but it is not clear whether this represents Origen's interpretation of the original text or something that was made explicit therein. See J. Z. Smith 1985:704,714.

[20] Cf. Ashton 1991:345; McGrath 1997d (provisionally p.85).

[21] So rightly Painter 1991:210.

[22] Cf. Painter 1992:1883, who makes a similar point concerning Son of God and Son of Man language in John.

[23] See further our discussion in ch.11 above. On the unity and disunity of Johannine christology with particular focus on John 6, see Anderson 1996:72-89,167 and *passim*.

is here crystallized, but is not resolved, and no explicit answer is given to the question of how the Son of Man and Wisdom related to one another prior to their union as the human being Jesus. Both have come down from heaven, and both are now to be identified with Jesus. Beyond that, John gives no indication of what views, if any, he may have held on this matter.[24]

15.3 The Son Who is Sent and Pre-Existence

One frequently reads in works of Johannine scholarship of the Johannine concept of the Son who is sent from heaven.[25] However, a number of scholars have stressed that this is in fact precisely what John does *not* say: he refers to the pre-existent one as Logos and Son of Man, but not (at least directly or explicitly) as *Son*.[26] John clearly uses the language of sending in connection with 'the Son', but such language is traditional, and is unlikely to have implied pre-existence in its traditional, pre-Johannine use.[27] The question which we must therefore ask is whether John actually refers to Jesus as *the Son* in connection with pre-existence, indicating a development of this earlier tradition. The answer appears to be negative. The fact that Jesus begins to be referred to in terms of sonship only from the incarnation, at which point the

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[24] It is interesting to note that Origen found it necessary to speak of the pre-existence of Jesus' soul, which was united with the Logos even in its pre-existence. Although space will not permit a discussion here, it would be interesting to explore further whether this is an attempt to harmonize various aspects of New Testament christology, or whether such an idea could have been in the Evangelist's mind.

[25] So e.g. Watson 1987:121f; Beasley-Murray 1992:1865.

[26] So e.g. Cadman 1969:11f; Brown 1991:89f.

[27] Dunn 1989:39f,44f; Robinson 1985:383.

term Logos also disappears, seems to provide an answer: λόγος is a designation appropriate only in reference to the pre-existent one, and μονογενὴς (υἱὸς) is a designation not of the pre-existent one, but of the Word-become-flesh, Jesus Christ (1:14).[28]

The reason for this, it has been suggested, is that John is concerned to maintain the monotheistic character of his christological beliefs. To speak of an eternal *Son* would, it is argued, give the appearance of belief in a 'second power in heaven', in a way that the use of less personal categories (such as Word) would not.[29] Yet we have found reason to question whether 'two powers' was an issue in the period when John wrote.[30] This aspect of John's portrait can be explained equally well by the fact that John found support in the traditions which he inherited for referring to the Son of Man and to God's Word/Wisdom as pre-existent, but did not find such ideas associated with the designation 'Son of God'. Legitimation depends to a very large extent on appeal to authoritative sources and traditions, and for this reason there may have been insufficient motivation to - or sufficient motivation not to - connect the imagery of sonship with pre-existence.

Of course, these considerations in no way make it impossible to suggest that John took the final step of identifying *all* of these designations with the pre-existent

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[28] See further p. 188 above.

[29] So e.g. Brown 1991:89f; see also Dunn 1991a:318f.

[30] See ch. 3 above.

one. However, we have no evidence that he did so, and certainty once again proves elusive. What is clear is that John felt that all of these designations and figures were ultimately to be identified with the human being Jesus, and this identification was John's distinctive contribution, which paved the way for the fuller identification that was made by Christians in later times between these various figures and designations even prior to the incarnation. In the Fourth Gospel, 'Christ' still appears to maintain its traditional character as a messianic title, closely connected with the messianic sense of 'Son of God',[31] whereas in the Johannine Epistles 'Christ' appears to refer at times to the pre-existent one, perhaps suggesting that this transfer of titles was a further development made out of and on the basis of John's portrait.[32] This in turn suggests that John did not completely harmonize these various elements. Both the Word and the Son are sent, but the former designates the divine agent sent from heaven, whereas the latter designates the human agent whom the Word becomes. The Son is the Messiah/Son of Man,[33] and yet whereas the one who is now designated as 'Son'

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[31] Cf. John 1:49; 10:24,36; 11:27; 20:31. The references to 'coming into the world' need not imply pre-existence (cf. Robinson 1985:370), but even if not originally intended by the Evangelist, such an understanding probably arose quite quickly, under the influence of the pre-existence motifs in John. Ashton (1991:207 n.5) is unnecessarily dismissive of Robinson's point.

[32] When 1 John was written the pre-existent one appears to have been designated as 'Christ' and 'Son of God' (cf. Painter 1991:394). This is an early interpretation of John, but may not represent the nuances and precise views of the author of the Gospel when he wrote the Gospel. Whether the author's views developed in a new context of a different conflict, or whether others developed his ideas, is difficult to tell, as it is unclear how much time elapsed between the relevant strata of the Gospel and the writing of 1 John.

[33] That during his earthly life Jesus is to be identified as both Son and Son of Man is clear from passages such as John 5:27. See also the close connection between the description of Jesus as the Son who is sent and as the Son of Man in John 3:13ff; ch.6; and 8:28.

pre-existed, John refrains from designating the pre-incarnate one as 'Son'. This left tensions in his portrait which even very early readers appear to have felt the need to resolve.

15.4 The Commissioning: Descending Logos and/or Ascending Seer?

Closely related to the previous two topics is the suggestion, which we had the opportunity to consider briefly earlier in this study, that Jesus is thought of as having ascended to heaven to receive revelation.[34] Our study suggests that John did in fact inherit such an idea, and it is possible that, while he may have altered its emphasis somewhat, he did not completely repudiate it. The question which we must consider here is whether this concept will provide the harmony that has eluded us in our previous two avenues of approach. To raise the question directly, will the view that Jesus ascended to heaven and subsequently descended enable us to somehow clarify the relationship between the descent of the Son of Man and the descent of Wisdom/Logos in John's thought?

We have already seen reasons for rejecting the view that there was a strong Jewish tradition in John's time which presented the seer as ascending to heaven and there being identified with a pre-existent heavenly figure.[35] The concept of the transformation of Enoch into a heavenly being is found in 2 Enoch 22:8, which may date from around the time of John, but this is not the same as the identification between Enoch

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[34] See above, 10.2.

[35] Above, pp.232f n.40. Cf. Bühner 1977:385-399.

and Metatron in 3 Enoch 4, which is much later. The interpretation of 1 Enoch 71:14 in terms of an identification of Enoch with the heavenly Son of Man appears to be much more difficult to maintain than the suggestion that 'son of man' (a different Ethiopic idiom than the one used elsewhere in 1 Enoch) here simply has its generic sense, 'human being', especially given that Enoch and the Son of Man are elsewhere in the Similitudes clearly distinguished.[36] We thus feel compelled to reject Bühner's interpretation of 1 Enoch.

However, the weakness of the argument based on the evidence of 1 Enoch does not completely rule out the possibility that *John* thought of the Son of Man as a figure who ascends and descends rather than descends and ascends. Nevertheless, this seems unlikely, not only because John shows himself to be aware of the apocalyptic traditions concerning the pre-existence of the Son of Man, but also because it appears to be the *descent* which, in 3:13, provides the focus of attention and emphasis, rather than ascent. John's emphasis is on the descent of the Son of Man and of God's Spirit/Wisdom/Word, which for him provides the basis for Jesus' revelation. Thus, while Bühner's interpretation cannot be ruled out absolutely, it seems less likely and less preferable than the one which we have adopted.

In light of these considerations, it is interesting to note that, in John 3:13, John has - whether intentionally or unintentionally - not completely eliminated the ascent tradition which he inherited, even though its role was made

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[36] See further Collins 1992. On the different idiom see Isaac 1983:50.

redundant by his emphasis on and reinterpretation of the Wisdom/Spirit descent tradition. Here too, then, we find a tension which John has not finally resolved, and in this particular instance there is no evidence that we are dealing with a tension that the Evangelist was content to retain, rather than an unintentional one resulting from his adaptation of a traditional saying or idea. Nonetheless the overall direction in which John developed christology seems clear. In earlier tradition, the emphasis appears to have been on the *exaltation* of Jesus. In John, it is on the *descent* of God's heavenly agent (who is of course still exalted to heaven after the resurrection). Both the continuity, and at the same time the change of emphasis, are not difficult to discern.

15.5 The Human Jesus and the Divine Logos

The question of the exact relationship between the humanity and divinity of Christ was not given a clear answer by John, as the debates of the subsequent centuries show.[37] Nonetheless, it is worth considering at least briefly the indications which John gives of what views, if any, he held on this subject. As we have already seen, the divine pre-existent one was believed to have become incarnate as the human being Jesus, and from that point on the two were to be identified, to such an extent that what could be predicated of the Logos could now also be predicated of the human being Jesus, the Word-become-flesh.[38] Did this mean that two

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[37] Cf. Hanson 1988, and our discussion above, 1.2.2.

[38] See our discussions above, esp. ch.7.

'persons' had now become one 'person'? John does not make explicit his views on the 'personality' of the Logos, if indeed he had any thoughts on the subject.[39] The fact that the Evangelist appears not to use the designation 'Son' in reference to the pre-existent some take to imply that he thought of the Logos as impersonal. However, it is wrong to apply such categories so rigidly: here too John was taking advantage of an ambiguity in the contemporary concept of the Logos. The Logos is not impersonal, since God is personal, but neither is the Logos a separate person from God. John inherited such views, and does not appear to explore beyond them, with the result that subsequent writers felt the need to address the issue.[40] John's portrait eventually resulted in the affirmation that Christ was one person with two natures, but the formulation of such a definition is an attempt to answer questions which John's portrait raises, but does not answer.

Before concluding, we should mention Fennema's work on John's development of earlier tradition. He rightly emphasizes that the Fourth Evangelist has merged in his portrait of Jesus the ideas and motifs connected with heavenly and earthly agents of God. "John's portrayal of Jesus as both a prophetic and a heavenly agent serves to remove the limitations inherent in each."[41] Thus Jesus - unlike the prophetic agents described in the Jewish scriptures - was wholly and unquestioningly

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[39] Although we would prefer not to use the terminology of 'person' and 'personal' here, in view of their technical connotations in christology, it has been felt necessary to use them, albeit in a less-than-technical way, in order to attempt to assess whether John indicates his views on this subject which would become so central in later christological discussions.

[40] Cf. Wiles 1987.

[41] Fennema 1979:294f.

obedient to the one who sent him. Yet on the other hand, he is clearly a separate individual from God, and not just a personified extension of his own being, sovereignty and will. While we do not agree with Fennema's characterization of John's aims in terms of the defence of monotheism, he has nonetheless summarized clearly and succinctly an important aspect of John's portrait of Jesus, one which would - in the long run - have the effect of driving on the further development of christology and of providing the basis on which a Christian redefinition and reaffirmation of monotheism would take place.[42]

15.6 Conclusion

We have not seen anything in our study which would suggest that the different strands of Johannine theology can be separated simply along the lines of the subject headings we have chosen for our different chapters. On the contrary, we have found all the key motifs of Johannine theology, such as Wisdom/Logos, Son of Man and agency, to have been used and developed by the Evangelist in relation to *various* issues in the conflict with the synagogue. And further, although we have seen a great many points of contact with earlier tradition,

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[42] Fennema's point about John's combination and identification of the heavenly and earthly agent ideas probably answers the question raised by Rainbow (1991:86) in response to Hurtado: "In short, if belief in divine agency did not affect Jewish monotheism, how can it explain the mutation in Christian monotheism?" It was not the idea of heavenly or human agents of God *per se* that eventually helped redefine Christian monotheism, but the identification of God's earthly agent and his personified attribute(s) in a way that had not previously been done within Judaism. This suggests that Hurtado is correct in his emphasis on Jewish concepts of agency to account for early christological categories, and that Fennema is correct to see the complete identification of Jesus by the Fourth Evangelist as both heavenly and earthly agent at the same time represents John's distinctive contribution which would influence the direction of future christological development.

nothing gave a clear and unambiguous indication that John made direct literary use of any other New Testament document. The most likely reason for this is perhaps that John's development of the traditions he inherited - whether these were one or more of the Synoptic Gospels, a written Signs Source or Gospel, or oral tradition - took place *prior to the writing of the Gospel*. The Gospel is the product of this development, a compilation of the Johannine Christians' responses to objections which had been raised against them. In it, the traditions which John inherited and the developments which he made are interwoven. This is not to say that pre-Johannine traditions cannot be detected underlying the present form of the Gospel at many points, but simply that it seems that, even if John has not woven these points into a completely unified picture, neither has he simply allowed early and late, tradition and interpretation, to simply stand side by side. Our model of legitimation helps us to understand how and why John developed the traditions which he inherited in the ways that he did, but it does not allow us to reconstruct the exact forms of those traditions in detail.

We must also recognize that it is somewhat unrealistic to expect total consistency in a document formed in the context of an intense conflict. The reason for this is that these developments were, for John and his readers, solutions to very pressing problems and issues. John is therefore unlikely to have had the leisure of reflecting on what issues might arise from his portrait over the next decades and even centuries, once the immediate conflict in which he was engaged had come to an end. Rather than disparage his inconsistency, a

sympathetic reading will more likely be amazed at the degree of consistency achieved in spite of these circumstances. As we have also seen, many aspects of John's portrait which appear to us to be in tension would not necessarily have appeared so to the Evangelist and his readers. Those tensions which are present in the text are nonetheless largely a result of the developments which John made as part of his legitimation. We should thus conclude that John attempted to answer the issues of his day by appealing to traditional beliefs and drawing the necessary implications from them. This resulted in a portrait of Jesus composed of numerous interwoven strands. These strands were developed to answer questions and issues raised in the conflict with the synagogue. For John, they were simply the implications of the traditions he inherited, expounded and elaborated in response to pressing issues in his community. For us, they are part of a problem, a text which forms part of the Christian canon, yet which is full of unresolved tensions, the implications of which Christian theologians continue to wrestle with.[43]

To sum up then, it is hard to find better words than those of Kysar, who writes, "It is feasible to say that the dialectical manner of thought and expression which we attribute to the evangelist arose out of the dialogue between his own views, as well as those of his contemporary community, and traditional positions. Hence, the dialectical method of the fourth evangelist is really the theological method of his community, as it dealt with its own experience in the light of

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[43] For differing interpretations of John in the early church see Hofrichter 1992; Wiles 1987. See also Hanson 1988 on the later Arian controversy.

the thought which was passed on to it from earlier times."[44] To this we would simply add that the dialectical tension exists not only between tradition and interpretation, but also between different elements of the interpretation as well. And whereas these tensions may have been the *result* of the process of legitimation and development which we have been tracing, this does not necessitate the conclusion that John did a poor editing job, leaving contradictions that he would have avoided had he been more careful. To allow Kysar to have the last word,

> It appears that the further we probe the paradoxes of the fourth gospel the more aware we become of the deliberate tension the evangelist wanted to create between the theology of his tradition and his own views. He apparently wanted to affirm the views of his tradition, while at the same time claiming the necessity of rethinking those views...The dialectical method of John is, therefore, the result of the way in which he preserved and affirmed the theological positions of his tradition, while at the same time offering revisions and correctives out of his own thought (and that of his contemporary church)...We hear him saying through his paradoxes that religious thought always emerges in a context shaped at once by historical tradition and the contemporary experience of the community of faith. For the evangelist, his tradition was a "living text" to be

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[44] Kysar 1985b:190.

re-read, under the guidance of the Spirit-Paraclete, in the light of the needs of his church. In this way, the dialectical thought of the evangelist is more than the brilliance of a single mind. It is the continuous conversation of a community with its own past and its own present experience.[45]

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[45] Kysar 1985b:202f. See also De Boer 1996:314f.

CHAPTER 16

CONCLUSION

It remains only for us to summarize our findings and to attempt to reflect on what implications this study may have for future Johannine scholarship and for the use of John in contemporary theology.

16.1 Summary

In our first chapter, we saw that there are a number of possible solutions to the problem of *why* Johannine christology developed along the distinctive lines that it did. We found it necessary to reject the approaches which we categorized as 'syncretistic', since these did insufficient justice to the Jewishness of Johannine thought and its close continuity with earlier Christian ideas and motifs. The suggestion that John's christology developed organically out of earlier traditions was given a more positive evaluation, but was nonetheless felt to do insufficient justice to the extent of the developments, and the need for some sort of catalyst or explanatory factor in order to understand the development. The suggestion that a particular individual's insight shaped the Johannine portrait of Christ was not denied, but we nonetheless felt it necessary to look for a different level of explanation, one which gave greater attention to the setting in which the author wrote and the factors which inspired or stimulated him to write as he did. We thus adopted a sociological approach, suggesting that,

in line with Berger and Luckmann's model of legitimation, the Fourth Evangelist adapted and developed the traditions which he inherited as part of a defence of his (and his community's) beliefs against objections raised by Jewish opponents.

After this we proceeded to set forth in our second chapter some of the evidence for the conflict setting which we have posited for the Gospel, and the points of continuity and further development between John and earlier Christian writings. In Part 2, we considered the influence of one key theme in the conflict, namely that of the relationship between Jesus and God. There we saw that John developed a number of earlier ideas, drawing out new and further implications from them in response to the objections which had been raised. John thus identified Jesus more fully with God's Word/Wisdom/Spirit than had been done previously; perhaps even, if Dunn is correct, crossing for the first time the fine line between inspiration and incarnation. John also appealed to the category of agency and the identification of Jesus as the Son of Man in order to defend the Christian belief that Jesus exercises divine prerogatives. The parallelism between the Word of God and the Name of God in Jewish writings was utilized in order to present Jesus not as a man who received the divine name when he was exalted, but as the person whom the Name/Word became, and as whom the Word/Name returned to heaven. By appealing to these and other traditions, John sought to defend the exalted status and functions attributed to Jesus by Christians.

In Part 3 we examined the issue of the relationship between Jesus and Moses and their respective revelations. John was seen to have developed the miracle tradition in order to

present Jesus' miracles as 'signs' similar to those of Moses. He also drew the new implication from the Son of Man tradition that, as the pre-existent Son of Man, Jesus could reveal heavenly things in a way that no other could. Jesus was also more fully identified with Wisdom than was the case in earlier writings: the one who had appeared to Moses had now appeared on the human scene 'as flesh'. Jesus had, in line with Jewish expectations, provided bread miraculously, and was himself the 'bread from heaven' which was expected to be provided in the last days. In chapter 14 we considered a number of other possible issues in the conflict, such as the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist (and also other figures from Israel's scriptures), the scandal of the cross and the rejection of Jesus by 'the Jews'. In each case we found our initial hypothesis confirmed: the development by the Fourth Evangelist of the tradition which he inherited is best explained in terms of legitimation, his attempt to provide an answer to objections and issues raised in the conflict with the synagogue.

Finally, we considered briefly whether the various developments made by John had been integrated by him into a coherent portrait of Jesus. We were forced to conclude that, while many aspects of his portrait would not have been as problematic for his contemporaries as they are for us today, at many points John did not have the luxury of reflecting on further implications which others after him might draw from his portrait. John's portrait was a *response* to a particular problem, and in the intensity of the conflict setting in which he wrote, he, not surprisingly, did not reflect on problems

and difficulties which those who came after him might find. From the Evangelist's perspective, he was simply drawing out the implications of the authoritative traditions which he inherited, as a response and solution to the pressing problem of the objections raised by 'the Jews'.

16.2 The Use of John in Contemporary Theology

We may now turn to consider some of the possible implications which this study may have for those seeking to read and use John's portrait of Jesus today.

16.2.1 Implications for Johannine Studies

A number of implications appear to arise out of the present study. Above all, we have seen reasons to reject attempts to place John in anything other than a Jewish setting and/or to appeal to non-Jewish influences to explain the development of Johannine christology. This supports those scholars and approaches which emphasize the need to interpret John not simply against the broad background of first century Hellenism, but rather against the more narrow background of first century Hellenistic Judaism. A corollary is that the methodologies employed to study John should do justice to this background, as indeed we have sought to do in this present study through the use of Berger and Luckmann's model of legitimation. Hopefully this thesis will have helped clarify some of the methodological possibilities available in approaching the issue of doctrinal development.

Another important conclusion arising out of our study is that the debate between the Johannine Christians and the local

synagogue was over *pre-Johannine* christological beliefs. The distinctive Johannine beliefs were seen to be an attempt to defend or legitimate earlier beliefs. This helps to bring a greater measure of clarity to the issue of whether Johannine christology was the *cause* or the *result* of the conflict with the synagogue. It has become popular to give the answer 'both', but hopefully the present study had shed some light on what such an answer might mean in practice: As certain influential strands of post-70 Judaism sought to draw in the boundaries of 'Judaism' by enforcing their own definition thereof, the Johannine Christians came under fire for the christological beliefs which they held. This conflict, and the legitimation it necessitated, resulted in many of the distinctive Johannine formulations. Christology is thus both cause and effect, but it is the pre-Johannine, more widespread christology which is the cause, and the distinctive Johannine developments which are the effect. It is thus to be hoped that this study will have helped to clarify a few of the issues relating to methodology, and to questions of 'before and after', in the study of Johannine christology.

In our study, we have focused on John's development of earlier *traditions* and *motifs*, and avoided any attempt to reconstruct the source(s) which were used by the Evangelist in creating his Gospel. While not opposed to such reconstructions, it is hoped that the methodology used in this study will provide a more secure basis for tracing the development of Johannine thought about Jesus than previous attempts which have been based on hypothetical source-reconstructions. Hopefully any future attempts at source

criticism of the Fourth Gospel will take as their starting point John's relationship to traditions known from other sources, traditions with which John appears to have been familiar, and will use the trajectory reconstructed by the use of this methodology as the basis for attempting to discern source and redaction in John. The fact that we have not engaged in source criticism here should not be taken to indicate a rejection of this methodology, but merely a conviction that this alternative approach will provide a useful supplementary or alternative approach which can shed light on a number of unanswered questions in Johannine scholarship.

16.2.2 Johannine Christology, Trinitarianism and Monotheism

We saw in Part 2 that John's aim was not, as many scholars have thought, to defend monotheism. Yet this was not because John denied monotheism, but rather because John's christology fit within the bounds of first-century Jewish monotheism. Within this context, it was possible to think of God's Logos or other mediating figures as extensions of God's own sovereignty and activity, and thus 'neither created nor uncreated', 'both God and distinct from God'. This paradox, read in light of issues which arose subsequently, was at the heart of the christological debates which took place in the centuries that followed. It is presumably also a key reason why defenders of a strict monotheism and defenders of a trinitarian monotheism have both found themselves able to appeal to John for support. Those theologians who regard John's portrait as an authoritative basis for any contemporary

reformulation will presumably want to maintain both these aspects if at all possible: that is to say, they will want to do justice both to the fact that John understood himself to be a monotheist and formulated his christology within the context of first century Jewish monotheism, and also to the fact that John's creative use of tradition ultimately - when considered in terms of its long-term impact - expanded the boundaries of what could be regarded as monotheism.[1] John's Gospel, when read in the light of issues and questions raised in subsequent centuries, pulls in two directions, because the one who is said to have been incarnate as the human person Jesus is regarded both as God himself, and as separate from and subordinate to God. The paradox of Johannine christology is an aspect of John's development of traditions which he inherited, utilizing motifs current in his day and age, and it is with this paradoxical portrait of Jesus that the church of all subsequent centuries has had to wrestle.

16.2.3 John's Approach to His Task and Ours

I have argued elsewhere that we share a common task with the New Testament authors, namely the task of taking up, adapting and applying the traditions which we have inherited, in response to the needs, issues and setting of our contemporary Christian communities.[2] This suggests that an attempt to simply repeat John's portrait would in fact be less faithful

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[1] Yet it must also be kept in mind that it was a prior redefinition of monotheism (in terms of *creatio ex nihilo*) which led to the reinterpretation of John, and thus to the further redefinition of monotheism along trinitarian lines. Cf. further ch.3 above.

[2] McGrath 1998a:47-50. See also my paper, "Christology on Two Fronts", read at the conference The Myriad Christ in Leuven in November 1997.

to the spirit and emphases of John than is often thought to be the case. John did not seek to resolve every possible christological issue for all time, but to give as convincing an answer as possible to questions raised in his own day. Presumably we would do well to do likewise, attempting to make the Christian tradition which we have inherited, including the Fourth Gospel, just as meaningful and relevant to our own setting and issues. Allowing John to speak today will mean speaking on his behalf, giving him a new voice to address new issues, drawing out new implications from his Gospel, and thus seeking to be as relevant to our day as he was to his.[3]

16.3 And Finally...

Our study cannot give an answer to the question of whether John's Gospel is a faithful exposition of the implications of earlier tradition, or whether it goes beyond anything that Jesus himself would have been happy with. But what it does suggest is that, whereas one can 'do' christology or theology, the task of theology is never finally 'done', as long as human history continues and new situations and needs, new worldviews, questions and ideas, continue to arise. And we can say that, if John had not adapted the traditions he inherited in the way that he did, Christianity would very possibly have found itself reabsorbed into Judaism, unable to defend the legitimacy of its beliefs and thus finding that the plausibility structure of its worldview had dropped out from under it. We thus have the ironic situation that, in order to

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[3] Cf. the similar conclusion reached by Esler 1987:223, at the conclusion of his work applying Berger and Luckmann's model of legitimation to Luke-Acts.

preserve the message of faith in Jesus, one must *change* it, that in order to remain faithful to Jesus, one must say something other than what he said. The implications of this may seem radical, but in fact this is nothing more than a call to do what Christians throughout history have always sought to do: to relate their beliefs and heritage to the life-setting in which they found themselves, without losing its distinctive emphases and meaning. This is the challenge which confronts the reader of the Fourth Gospel even today.

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